Uncanny, Thrilling, Mysterious

Weird Tales

NOVEMBER

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TOWERS OF DEATH

doom in the crystal ball: By Henry Kuttner

• • •

and other uncanny stories

A YEAR AGO HE WAS SET TO BE FIRED

... NOW HE'S RIGHT-HAND-MAN TO THE BOSS!

"YES sir," continued Joe, "his desk used to be right next to mine—now look where he is."

Half proudly and half enviously he and Frank watched Ed as he swung down the company steps, his arm linked in that of J.P., the head of the firm. Ed is getting $7,500 a year now, while Joe at $5,000 is a long way ahead of Frank, a newcomer.

"Boy, he must be plenty smart," said Frank.

"Plenty smart is right," said Joe. "Ed has a lot on the ball, but in spite of that he was slated to go."

"For what?" Frank wanted to know. "A guy like that . . ."

"Well, maybe you wouldn't believe it, but it was his breath . . ."

"Drank a lot, eh?"

"Not Ed. Never a drop, but most of the time he had a case of halitosis* that would knock you down."

"One of those birds, eh? Didn't he read the Listerine Antiseptic ads. Didn't anybody tip him off?"

"Sure, I tipped him off, but not before he almost got the toss. You see, Ed had to see an awful lot of people—close contact stuff. At first they never said anything about it, but later on that breath of his was getting him in bad with his customers. Finally a few of the crustier ones began to write in, complaining, and at last J. P. himself got on to it."

"You'd think J.P. would say something . . . a good man like Ed."

"I understand he did, Frank. Maybe he didn't make it plain enough. Anyhow Ed never took a tumble—and his job hanging in the balance."

"Chump!"

"You said it. But there's hundreds like him; suspecting everybody but themselves."

"Well," demanded Frank, "what happened?"

"I got Ed out one night. After a couple of drinks, to give me courage, I let him have the bad news about that breath of his. Told him he better get going on Listerine and keep it up if he wanted to stay on with the firm."

"You certainly didn't pull your punches."

"I certainly didn't. And boy, was he sore at first. And then grateful. Worked my hand up and down like it was a pump handle. Since then you never saw a guy so careful about the impression he makes on others."

Frank nodded. "The last place I worked, they were plenty fussy about that sort of thing. I think every firm should have a standing order 'Listerine Antiseptic before you call on a customer.' I guess it pays."

"And how! If you think it didn't, just look at Ed; he sure is going places."

***Nobody is immune!** Everybody probably has halitosis (bad breath) at some time or other without realizing it. That's the insidious thing about this offensive condition. Sometimes halitosis is due to systemic conditions, but usually and fortunately it is caused, say some authorities, by fermentation of tiny food particles in the mouth. Listerine quickly halts such food fermentation and then overcomes the odors it causes. Your breath becomes sweeter, purer, less likely to offend. Always use Listerine before business and social engagements. Lambert Pharmacal Co., St. Louis, Mo.*

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Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U. S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 34 — NOVEMBER, 1939 — Number 5

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

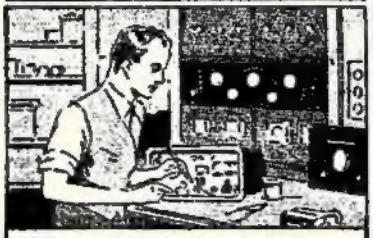
I jumped from $18 a week to $50
—a Free Book started me toward this
GOOD PAY IN RADIO

HERE'S *How it Happened*

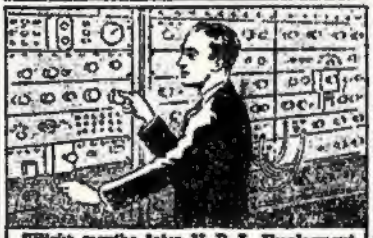
by S. J. E.
(NAME AND ADDRESS SENT UPON REQUEST)

"I had an $18 a week job in a shoe factory. I'd probably be at it today if I hadn't read about the opportunities in Radio and started training at home for them."

"The training National Radio Institute gave me was so practical I was soon ready to make $5 to $10 a week in spare time servicing Radio sets."



"When I finished training I accepted a job as service man with a radio store. In 3 weeks I was made service manager at more than twice what I earned in the shoe factory."



"Eight months later N. R. I. Employment Department sent me to Station KWUK as a Radio operator. Now I am Radio Engineer at Station WSUL. I am also connected with Television Station WNEK."

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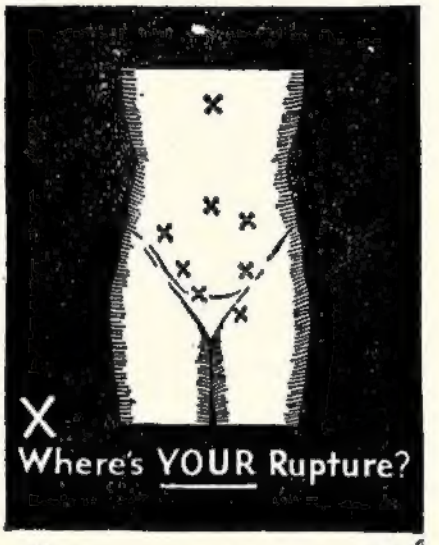

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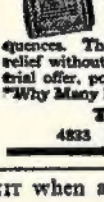

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The Man Who Died Twice

By ELI COLTER

Strange is the story of the human monster who was known as Tartar Kellidreyfuss, and the murder of one who was already dead.

MAKE haste, Rodolfo, my best beloved of brothers; fetch to my bedside paper and pen and ink, and write down this dark record which I shall dictate to you. It is imperative that we succeed in transcribing all, to the last horrescent detail, before I die; lest your own life pay the forfeit for our failure. I am young to die, am I not, Rodolfo? Only twenty-five years old yesterday, yet before

this day will have waned—I shall be dead.

But you are too young to die also, my brother. We always thought it so felicitous a circumstance that we could celebrate our birthdate anniversaries together, having been born on the same day but one year apart. Henceforth you must commemorate that anniversary alone, for I shall not allow this decree of death to be executed upon you who are guiltless of all offense and unanswerable for any responsibility in the matter. Fetch the writing-paraphernalia. You must obey me unquestioningly, as you have always obeyed me because I was the elder. Make haste, Rodolfo, while I have yet remaining sufficient strength to render articulate the appalling secret which burdens my brain. Make haste! Already the sweat of death creeps at the roots of my hair. . . .

Ah—back so soon? You are ready to begin? Considerate and obliging, as always.

There is so much about you that is commendable and admirable, Rodolfo. I have tried to evidence my affection and concern for you as we grew up, my brother, though I have not been inherently a loquacious or demonstrative man. I have striven to guide and guard you whenever there was the slightest need or opportunity for guidance and guardianship. In pursuit of that course, I would shield you now from shock and horror, if I could. I would write with my own hand this chronicle of base revelation, and spare you the odious task; but I cannot even do that.

Already my sight is beginning to dim, my strength is beginning to ebb from me. I must conserve all my physical stamina and mental capacity for the purpose of reciting to you with undeviating clarity this section of our family history.

Over two hundred years ago, Rodolfo, there was born into our family line a monster. You will know his name well; the accursed name of Tartar Kellidreyfuss. Even his name was an abortion. What sort of name is that? Kellidreyfuss! What can be its genesis or its genealogical significance? None knows. It is of mongrel breed. And the name Tartar! His mother bestowed that name upon him, Rodolfo; because, as she said, in his father she had caught a Tartar, and she considered the boy doomed to be an ill-favored duplicate of his father.

There might have been more in her saying than met the ear, I have sometimes thought. It is possible that in declaring she had caught a Tartar she meant most literally what she said, that old Tartar Kellidreyfuss was descended from those Moslem and Turkish inhabitants of the Russian Empire who were remnants of the Mongol invasion of the Thirteenth Century.

What do you say, Rodolfo? You puzzle over the etymology of the word Tartar, or Tatar? But there is no riddle in it, my brother. It roots from the Ta-Ta Mongols of the Fifth Century, then extant in the northeast Gobi. The Khitans subjected them in the Ninth Century, and they migrated south to found the Mongol empire under Jenghiz Khan. Under the rule of his grandson, Batu, they moved westward toward the plains of Russia, driving with them numerous branches of the Turkish Ural-Altaians. So that, if old Tartar descended from the Tatars, one traces his lineage easily enough. True, if existing likenesses of him are faithful to their subject, there was no hint of the Mongol in his features. But the ethnographical features of present Tatars in European Russia show scarcely any trace of Mongolian blood. Old Tartar bore more resemblance to the Turks. So do the Tatars, Rodolfo.

But Tatar or no, whatever race or breed was in him, he lived and died a monster; and though he has been dead for over a hundred years, I want this statement to go down at the head of your record, Rodolfo: the statement that Tartar Kellidreyfuss is

solely and wholly the man at whose door all guilt and shame for this hideous offense lies.

I THINK he was born a monster, from the spawn of monsters that frequent some godless sphere beyond our human ken. He first saw light as human flesh in the ancient *schloss* crowning that dark forested mountain above the Rhine. Ah, the noble Rhine, Rodolfo! All along its seven hundred miles, from the Alpine glacier that cradles it, to the open sea that waits to receive it after its weary journey through thundering gorges, through that inland sea called Lake Constance, past cities and peaceful meadows and towering mountains, it is haunted by two thousand years' legends and memories of turbulent days and dark deeds. Along its banks once rolled the war cries of Teutons, Romans, Normans, Franks and Gauls. It viewed the passing pomp and plunder of chieftains and conquerors, from Cæsar and Attila to Napoleon and Charlemagne. But none of its whispered legends of dark deeds can compare with, let alone surpass, the unspeakable history of Tartar Kellidreyfuss.

It is said that on the day he was born that forested mountain shivered in the wild downpour of icy rain, that the ancient *schloss* groaned hollow echo to the deafening thunder which rocked and crashed about its moss-scarred stones, that the river boiled and hissed vain protest at the lightning bolts that tore its waters. Fitting advent for old Tartar, if the tale is true.

You remember the *schloss*, do you not, Rodolfo? Our ancestral castle. Our ancestral sepulcher, rather! Our ancestral reminder of what might have been a noble line had Tartar Kellidreyfuss never been born. You will remember our trip abroad with our father, the year before he died; when you were eighteen and I was nineteen. The interim is not a long period over which to remember. I can see the enormous ruin still in my mind's eye, huddled there among the encroaching vines and trees on its mountain top, with the Rhine roaring past far below. I remember to this day the peculiar shrinking feeling I had as we followed our father through the outer gate, and through the several similar portals which opened beyond.

It was like passing through the successive doors of a safety vault, and I wondered whether we would ever emerge sane again. I remember our father's saying that a handful of men could have repelled an army there, and his pointing to the ponderous gates and the loopholes piercing the massive walls. I could hear the clang of arms and the clatter of horses' feet there in those roofless corridors. I could vision a mailed watchman standing guard. I shivered inwardly as I regarded the donjon keep, that grim old blood-washed tower; and the torture well, half filled with fallen stones bathed in a dank stench. Horrible! I felt that all the evil of time lurked there.

You say you had the same inarticulate terrors besetting you then, Rodolfo? I am not surprised. I had the impression at the time that you shared my vast unease inside that sinister ruin, and my speechless relief when we emerged from it in our father's wake and hurried recklessly down the mountain. Did you carry with you a vision of old Tartar there in all his ruthless power, when the *schloss* was intact and flourishing, my brother? So did I.

But it fell lamentably short of the grim reality. The old robber barons of the Rhine were kindly and benevolent citizens compared to him, Rodolfo; though (and the *schloss* was too thoroughly isolated and secluded for there to be any wonder in the fact) he did not betray his devotion to ghastly outrages until he was already old. He had never been considered an ordinary man, you understand. He was credited

with the powers of the occult, was regarded as what one would now term a mystic.

Mystic! That is far too humanitarian a term for the status old Tartar Kellidreyfuss had achieved, Rodolfo. He was superhuman and inhuman, though he was sly and cunning enough to prevent his fellow human beings from learning fully what manner of monster he was.

You have heard how he fled from the old *schloss* to America, bringing with him the fortune he had acquired and his one living relative, his great-grandson, then a small child. But I think you have not heard that the reason for his sudden flight was the whispered intelligence that all his holdings were to be confiscated. He had no mind to countenance what he considered so unfounded an outrage upon his person and his liberty. He knew well enough why such a ruthless course of retribution was to be leveled upon him.

He had acquired control over the forces that regulate life and death. He did not die at the age of a hundred and seventeen because he could not continue to live longer, Rodolfo. He simply passed out of this existence voluntarily because he had wearied of it, he had exhausted all its potentialities, and it no longer had any capacity to amuse him. All his days had been given to unspeakable rites and unholy practises. His guards and vassals had been faithful to him because they feared him, and because they were as foully evil as he. But no vile degradation can be concealed forever—on a mountain top! Too much was being whispered about his mystery-shrouded activities. He had nearly run his course if he would continue to be unmolested.

SO HE thumbed his nose at the Government that would confiscate his holdings, took his great-grandson and his fortune, and fled—leaving the Government's insolent executors nothing to find but a gaunt and silent *schloss* whose echoing stone corridors were strewn with the mutilated corpses of the servitors who had bowed to and done his will so long. There were found, too, in that gloomy old structure, bones and half-preserved remains of his kin; since all his long line of posterity had been tortured and done to death by him for the sheer entertainment brutal murder afforded him, all but the small great-grandson he took with him, Lambeth Kellidreyfuss.

Why he had permitted little Lambeth to live is scarcely any mystery, when you realize, Rodolfo, that it could have been but for one reason—in the anticipation of visiting upon Lambeth sundry new methods of torture and indignities he was hatching in his monster's brain. And they were atrocities which would lack complete fulfilment if perpetrated on any human being less than a man of full maturity, in sound health. Therefore he took Lambeth with him when he fled, and watched over Lambeth and made certain that he was nurtured and guarded well as he grew up.

Yet he was of no mind to hasten his assault upon Lambeth: rather he delayed it, savoring, during his lengthening procrastination, all the ramifying possibilities of his diabolical scheme; like a slavering-jawed tiger ready to pounce, waiting, waiting.

So that, my brother, this situation had developed; here in these mountains of Arizona, near this desert town you and I love so well, old Tartar Kellidreyfuss, exile from his own country, lived in his big adobe house sheltered behind its high walls and its towering live-oak trees in an isolated canyon—the same stone and adobe house in which our great-grandfather lives now. He had reached the age of a hundred and seventeen. He was possessor of ten million dollars. He had acquired a mere handful of fear-ruled servitors. And Lambeth Kellidreyfuss had now become a mature man of twenty-five.

But Lambeth was not stupid. You realize that, Rodolfo. You have seen enough of him to know that the exact opposite is the case: Lambeth is, and was, infinitely shrewd and keen of perception. He was too intelligent to live so long with old Tartar, under the regard of old Tartar's veiled eyes and plotting brain, not to sense some hint of the old man's horrible intent toward him. Fear was born in Lambeth, and grew and increased until he was beside himself with dread and repulsion. He was watched so closely that no opportunity ever was granted him to escape from the old adobe house. In sheer desperation he turned to the only course left him. He determined to kill old Tartar, quickly, before old Tartar could lay obscene hands on him.

He did not know that old Tartar could read his mind. We can't ever search the minds of those who can read our own, can we, Rodolfo? They are too clever for us; they erect between us and themselves a mental wall of defense. And Lambeth was helpless as well as doomed. He was also not guiltless of avarice and selfishness. He wanted to live, but he wanted as well to live royally on the fortune old Tartar had amassed. He plotted cold-bloodedly to kill old Tartar, then: to search out and destroy whatever will old Tartar had made, so that he as sole heir would without delay or hindrance come into that vast inheritance.

But old Tartar foiled Lambeth's attempt with ridiculous ease, and laughed in his face, and cloistered himself in his most private quarters to ponder upon the insulting transgression of his great-grandson, and to decide what course of retaliation upon Lambeth would suit him best. He intended to maneuver a revenge which should prove fitting to the occasion and adequate to the offense. And when he had conceived it, he sat and laughed for a day and a night.

Then he made out his will with a great show of disdaining secrecy. He slew all his faithful servants and buried them in the canyon beyond the adobe house. He grimaced contemptuously at the law that would bring him to account for his overt homicide. Then he lay down and died.

What do you say, Rodolfo? Wherein did such an apparent capitulation to defeat wreak revenge on Lambeth? But wait, my brother. Wait!

When old Tartar's will was read, this is what it decreed: that his ten-million-dollar estate was left in trust; that Lambeth Kellidreyfuss was to receive the interest on that fortune as long as he lived; that, when Lambeth's oldest great-grandson should reach the age of twenty-five years, that great-grandson, whoever he might be, was to receive the principal in full. That was all. Simply and clearly stated.

Lambeth raged and tried to break the will, but nothing he could do was of any avail. The will stood. Lambeth was forced to accept the interest of the huge sum as his sole legacy. And now, if you will consider well, Rodolfo, you can begin to see the slow but inexorable working of old Tartar's revenge.

IN THE beginning, after the old man's death, Lambeth burned with hate and seethed with rebellion at such retaliation on him for his attempt on old Tartar's life. He realized with full clarity that it was the old man's method of punishing him. He, Lambeth, had committed the unpardonable sin of trying to kill his great-grandfather: for that gross effrontery he was to be deprived of the fortune he coveted and see it descend to his own great-grandson. He was to mature and grow old, hating more virulently every day the sly old monster who had cheated him. He was to dream continually what he could have done with that great amount of money. He was to grow so intolerably galled over the irretrievable loss of it that

he would attempt by every known means to end his life.

All of which, of course, old Tartar had foreseen to the last humiliating detail.

What do you say, Rodolfo? You are puzzled to discern how old Tartar could be certain of such problematic revenge? That Lambeth might have died, that even should he live to a great age he might never have had any great-grandchild? That by the very procession of the laws of human living, all of the old man's cunning might have come to naught?

Ah, but you forget, my brother! You forget that old Tartar Kellidreyfuss had power over life and death. He could make certain from the other side of that veil of the Unknown that Lambeth did not die! He could render abortive and futile any attempt Lambeth should make on his own life. And he did just that, Rodolfo. He hovered over Lambeth like a guardian angel, preserving his life and insuring his continued welfare. He even gathered about himself there on his spirit plane a select group of followers little less powerful than he, to aid him in molding and furthering Lambeth's earthly career in the exact channels he had decreed for it.

By this course Lambeth was rendered consistently helpless, Rodolfo. He was forced to live, willy-nilly, whether he would or no. He was forced to marry, and beget a daughter, and see her grow up and marry Creighton Lander, our grandfather. He was forced to watch, with the fifth-wheel feeling of an impotent bystander, as his line of progeny marched on; with children being born and growing to maturity and marrying and dying and leaving other children to grow up and marry, till there was nothing remaining of that line but old Lambeth Kellidreyfuss himself, and you and I, Rodolfo Grace Lander and John Hale Lander. And at no time in all that deathly monotony of years was he ignorant of the exact cause of the horrible existence forced upon him. For it *was* horrible to him.

Consider, Rodolfo, being compelled to live when you wanted to die. Consider wanting to die because the galling realization of another's sly course of revenge upon you was never absent from your thoughts day or night, and the consuming bitterness and rebellion that inevitably would well in you tremendously must at all times avail you naught. Consider, worst of all, the unquestionable certainty that the entire process of persecution was merely prelude to the culminating climactic coup which was to come; that the real final stroke of revenge loomed ahead of you, that you had had no slightest intimation of what avenue it would take, but you did know indubitably that it would far outshadow anything that had gone before. Oh, it could be horrible enough, Rodolfo!

Not the least of the horror to Lambeth was the humiliating knowledge that old Tartar, ruling his life as ruthlessly and completely as he ever had in the flesh, was from his detached plane of existence gloating and laughing and reveling in the refined torture he was levying upon his great-grandson. And every day his hate of old Tartar grew till he was all but mad of it. But there could not be for him even the release of going mad, since old Tartar was on guard against that very eventuality and would not allow its consummation. Old Tartar was not to be cheated in any least iota of his revenge.

But wait, my brother. Do not express yet your dismay at such fiendish cunning. By far the most ghastly detail of old Tartar's scheming is yet to be revealed.

He had left, unknown to any man save the officials of the trust company which was keeping his immense fortune in holding, two sealed envelopes. One of these envelopes was addressed to whatever man should be head of the trust company at the time when the envelope was to be

opened. The other was addressed so: *"To the oldest great-grandson of Lambeth Kellidreyfuss, to be delivered to him and opened by him on his twenty-fifth birthday anniversary."* Both envelopes were to be delivered and opened upon that great-grandson's twenty-fifth birthday anniversary, and not under any consideration before. And I, John Hale Lander, being that oldest great-grandson (the older, speaking properly, since there is no other but you, Rodolfo), upon opening that envelope was to read the document enclosed. This is what I was to read:

"Young man, whatever your name may be, these are your instructions which follow. If you would receive the fortune left by me in trust for you, there is this condition which you must fulfill: within one week of your receipt of this document you must kill your great-grandfather, Lambeth Kellidreyfuss. Under no consideration can you avoid obeying this command. To do so is to forfeit your inheritance. I have left with the head of the trust fund a document which reads so:

" 'If, within one week of the twenty-fifth birthday anniversary of the oldest great-grandson of Lambeth Kellidreyfuss, Lambeth Kellidreyfuss should die of natural causes, the said great-grandson is to inherit my entire fortune without any condition whatsoever. If Lambeth Kellidreyfuss should still be living at the end of the stated period, or should the young man die, my entire fortune is to pass to the next of kin.'

"Have no fear of any reprisal, young man, for taking the life of that evil old man, Lambeth Kellidreyfuss. No one will ever have the slightest suspicion that you are responsible for his death. He will appear to have died of natural causes. You have but to call on him and dine with him, and drop into his coffee the thin flat wafer enclosed in this envelope. He will die slowly, but he will know that he is dying. He will know that he, who once tried to kill his great-grandfather, is paying for that deed by dying at the hand of his own great-grandson. He will know that this death at your hands is the final act in my long-drawn pursuit of vengeance upon him. And henceforth you shall live in luxury and peace.

"Signed,
TARTAR KELLIDREYFUSS."

WHAT do you say, Rodolfo? That you smile to think how signally his evil revenge must fail, that I could not even countenance so terrible an act? Ah, but you are wrong! I did not hesitate for an instant. Last night I went to have dinner with our great-grandfather, old Lambeth Kellidreyfuss, now past his one hundred and seventh birthday anniversary. I dropped the thin wafer into his coffee when he was out of the room.

But he—he was too shrewd for me, Rodolfo. When I was not looking he changed the cups, giving his to me and taking mine. Too long he had been suspicious of old Tartar's probable attempt at final retaliation through me. Intuition warned him of my intent. And after we had eaten, and I, feeling unaccountably queer and light-headed, said I must be going home, he laughed in my face and told me what he had done.

So I have come home to die, Rodolfo. And only this morning, with old Tartar's grim hold on him released, old Lambeth *did* die of natural causes. And even though it shall appear that I also have died of natural causes, you will be suspect, Rodolfo. Because you are to receive the fortune as next of kin, you will be suspect in the eyes of a law that sees too many people, who stand between an inheritance and a legatee, die apparently from natural causes but actually at the hand of the impatient inheritor-to-be. And if I did not leave you in such a position as to stand absolutely clear of all suspicion, God knows what perverse concomitant circumstances might

serve to convict you of a crime you did not commit.

And now I come to the most hideous aspect of this grim revelation. Do not look at me, Rodolfo. I cannot bear the clear and honorable light of those steadfast eyes upon me now. I cannot endure seeing their affectionate concern turn to repulsion and horror. I cannot bear to see you shrink from me in abomination and loathing, which you must inevitably do before I have fully expended my next breath.

For I—John Hale Lander—I am Tartar Kellidreyfuss reincarnated. It is so that I know all which went before in unerring detail, Rodolfo, most beloved of brothers. When I awoke yesterday morning to my twenty-fifth birthday anniversary because I myself had willed it, I remembered without lack or deviation the entire pattern of my abhorrent life. I remembered how, with diabolical exultance, I had anticipated how I should at last kill with my own hands (since my hands made the wafer) the great-grandson who had attempted to take my life; how I, reincarnated in his own great-grandson, should gloat to see him die, and throw in his face the taunting revelation of my identity; how I, young and strong in the flesh again, with a long and promising life ahead of me, should place in my own hands far in the future the very fortune he would have filched from me when he himself was young.

But I reckoned without the human element, Rodolfo. For twenty-five years I have lived the upright life of John Hale Lander, your elder and affectionate brother. Not all the evil of old Tartar Kellidreyfuss can nullify completely the redemption I have gained in this short human passage. There is highest in me now the determination to atone for the monstrous thing I have been, by recording this revelation, and ascertaining that you shall be placed beyond all danger of suspicion, free to make wise and commendable use of old Tartar's money through a benevolent and judicious life.

Bring the document that I may sign it, Rodolfo.

What do you say, my brother? Look at you? Do not keep my eyes averted and my face lowered? How can I raise my gaze? How can I bear to see your abhorrence, your revulsion? How can I bear—why, what is this I see in your face, in those steadfast eyes I have loved so long? No condemnation? No shrinking? Nothing but pity, and that indulgent affection which was always there for me! Compassion and forgiveness. God bless you, my brother, it is easier to say the rest now.

This you must realize. The law will demand proof. The wielders of the law will be reluctant to believe so weird a statement as I have made, so incredible a chronicle. They would condemn as insane the assertion that I, who have been dead for over a hundred years, have been murdered by my great-grandson who is at the same time my great-grandfather—unless they have proof that the assertion is true. They shall have their proof, Rodolfo.

See, I will sign my name: John Hale Lander, in the chirography you know. Beneath that I will sign the name Tartar Kellidreyfuss, in handwriting no man now living ever has seen but which will prove identical with that signature appended to the two documents left with the trust company.

WHAT is that you say, Rodolfo? You are persuaded that I have some mad delusion in my brain? My birth-date anniversary does not come until tomorrow? You know of no document being delivered to me?

Partly you are in error, my brother. When we were very small children, I wanted my birth-date set three days ahead, that you and I might always celebrate to-

gether. Our mother humored me. No one is now living who was cognizant of that fact, no one but me. My real birth-date anniversary was yesterday; and because I myself had willed to remember upon that day, I remembered everything and had no need to see any documents. I recalled only too well exactly what was in them both. I had no need to possess that wafer of death. I made it. I knew what was in it. I made another.

Again, in part you are correct, Rodolfo. No document has been delivered to me. In that fact lies the last proof you need, the indisputable proof, of the validity of this record. I have signed this record with the handwriting of Tartar Kellidreyfuss, and the only specimens of it which exist are signed to those documents. I have given you the precise wording of those documents in this record. And the documents lie securely locked away in an ancient safe which was delivered to the trust company by old Tartar himself and has remained there untouched all these years. No one ever knew the combination to that safe but Tartar Kellidreyfuss. The trust company is instructed to break open the safe in order to secure the enclosed documents on the appointed day: on my twenty-fifth birth-date anniversary, which all who know me believe to be tomorrow, and which only I knew to be yesterday. When the officers of the law break open that safe and compare those documents with this record, they will have incontestable proof that all I have said is valid and true.

I die, Rodolfo. I, John Hale Lander, go from this world in the performance of a deed that is offered in atonement for the base activities of the monster Tartar Kellidreyfuss. Sometimes, my brother, remember me; kindly if you can, for all I was to you, forgetful, if you may, of the demoniacal thing I did not dream I was. Good-bye, Rodolfo. Tartar Kellidreyfuss is hoist with his own petard. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, evil returned to the vileness that spawned it. And somewhere, on some far dim plane beyond all perception of man, but noted and recognized by the God who rules, the spark of a better life begun.

Good-bye, best beloved of brothers. Good-bye!

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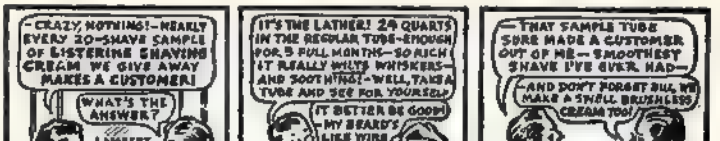
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Towers of Death

By HENRY KUTTNER

The old man dallied with evil magic, and sought to double his span of life at his nephew's expense, but the world ended for him at the Towers of Silence in a Persian cemetery

SIMEON GERARD leaned forward in the great leather chair. His white, withered face showed no trace of expression as he said, "I am to die in a month, then?"

Doctor Stone hesitated. He felt ill at ease in this great, high-ceilinged room, dimly lit by the red glow of a dying fire. The pungent smoke that curled up from swinging censers tickled his throat. And this strange, shrunken man before him only added to the physician's discomfort. Though Stone had attended Gerard for years, he had always felt a vague, indefinable dislike for the old eccentric. He could not have told exactly why.

Simeon Gerard held up a claw of a hand and looked at the fire through its translucent parchment. "A month, you say?" he repeated.

"Roughly, I should say so," Doctor Stone said, more loudly than he had intended. His round, well-shaved face glistened in the reddish glow. "You may live much longer—you may die tonight. Frankly, Gerard, I warned you this was coming."

For a moment the old man's pale blue eyes turned to the doctor. A mocking smile seemed to dance in their depths. "You should have attended Des Esseentes," he said.

Stone missed the allusion to Huysman's character. He went on stolidly, "This hobby of yours—from a moral standpoint, I have nothing to say. It's none of my business. But it has undermined your health. If you wanted to play with occultism——"

"What?" Gerard's tufted eyebrows lifted.

"Well—devil-worship, then! Praying to Satan and holding Black Masses, or whatever it is—that was your affair. But I know quite well that you've been taking some poisonous drug or other, against my orders, and doing God knows what else."

"I have made—experiments," Gerard admitted.

The physician shrugged. "There's nothing more to be said. I advise you to get your affairs in order. I'll come whenever you need me. Perhaps I had better leave these——" He laid a small bottle upon a nearby table, and hesitated slightly before resuming. "There will be pain, I'm afraid. Great pain."

Gerard stood up. A spasm crossed his wrinkled face, but he repressed it immediately. Standing straight and still by the fire, he murmured, "I shall not need you again, Stone. Take your opiate with you. I shall not require it, or you. Send your bill to me, or to my heir. Good evening."

He made no offer to shake hands, and, after an awkward pause, Doctor Stone went to the door and let himself out of the house.

GERARD remained unmoving, thinking. His thin lips twisted into an ironic grimace. Stone—how little the

A blast of searing flame poured out through the portal

stupid fool guessed of his patient's "experiments." No doubt the doctor considered him an eccentric, senile idiot, mumbling the Lord's Prayer backward to an inverted crucifix. There were older deities than Lucifer. . . .

There was Ahriman.

Years before, some quirk in Gerard's neurotic mind had started him on the little-trodden pathway. At first, blindly studying and experimenting with the familiar superficialities of occultism, he had searched for a thrill, something to spur his jaded senses. Then, later, he had visited the Orient, had visited certain forbidden sects and temples, and had learned much. A renegade priest of Ormuzd helped him secure a number of secret and very old manuscripts hidden in Teheran, and had introduced him into a cult which the authorities did not know existed. For the first time Gerard learned of the Dark Wisdom, and realized that his haphazard delvings had been superficial indeed.

He had come back to America changed. At first he plunged into a riotous life of sensuality, but that did not last long. The next phase was a period of intensive study, of long letters exchanged with men whose addresses were always mysterious postoffice boxes, and of innumerable additions to his already large library. Stone built a home in the country, employing dark, foreign-looking workmen, and retired there with a few Oriental servants. He still lived here, though a small city had grown up around him during the course of years.

So Doctor Stone suspected some poisonous drug! If that smug worthy actually had any idea of the nature of his patient's "experiments," he would undoubtedly have summoned the police and a priest as well, Gerard thought. For fifty years Simeon Gerard had gratified his every wish—and some of them had been monstrous indeed. A bargain of that nature is not paid for lightly. Yet—and Gerard smiled a little—the demands had not been hard to fulfil. As a millionaire, silent partner in a dozen flourishing businesses, he had acquired money; and through his own efforts he had made various desirable underworld connections — desirable, because it was necessary at times to procure quite illegal commodities . . . but Gerard was careful, and only one man besides himself knew of a strangely-shaped altar in a subterranean room under the house—an altar stained blackly with dried blood.

That man was Dagh Ziaret, a Persian. He owned a tiny, dark art shop in a slum district of the city, though most of his business was transacted downstairs in a cellar that resembled an alchemist's retreat.

Gerard thought of Dagh Ziaret now. Undoubtedly the Persian could give him the aid he needed. But first——

HE REACHED for a telephone and called his attorney.

"Morton? I've just had bad news. My doctor tells me I'm dying. . . . Don't be a hypocritical fool. I've no time to listen to your lies. You are *not* sorry. . . . I want to transfer all my possessions to my nephew, Steven. What? No, I want this done while I'm alive. Prepare the document and bring it to my home in—well—an hour. . . . Good."

Gerard next telephoned Steven and made an appointment for later in the evening. Finally he sent a message, through an intermediary, to a man whose illegal activities included the supplying of drugged victims to a crimp, who in turn found them berths on various ships. Since none of Gerard's underworld helpers had ever seen his face, he felt quite safe in making his arrangements.

All was ready, now. Gerard called a taxi and had himself driven to within a few blocks of Dagh Ziaret's shop. He walked the rest of the distance, not with-

out considerable pain. Yes, his experiments had taken their toll.

The Persian shuffled into view from behind a counter. He was a bent, skinny man whose kinky white beard was in startling contrast to his swarthy skin. Blinking black eyes scrutinized the visitor closely.

Then, without a word, Dagh Ziaret turned and moved to the back of the shop. Opening a heavy door, he descended steep stairs, Gerard at his heels, and unlocked a panel of massive metal. The two men crossed the threshold. Dagh Ziaret barred the door behind them.

The air was musty and stagnant, filled with a choking and strangely sweet musk-perfume. Oil lamps threw out wan circles of yellow light. Gerard's footsteps rang with a hollow sound on the wooden floor, as though another chamber existed below. He suspected this to be the case, but had no means of knowing.

The walls were entirely covered with shelves, on which stood an assortment of great bottles, alembics, retorts, and a myriad books, bound variously in parchment, vellum, leather, and less easily recognizable substances. A few littered tables were here and there; on one of these was a large object covered by a black cloth.

Dagh Ziaret coughed rackingly. "I do not think you will come here much longer, *effendi,*" he said.

Gerard nodded. "Perhaps you are right."

The Persian leaned forward, his face twisted into a wrinkled mask. "I see death in your eyes."

The other laughed. "And you see it without your globe! Yet you may be mistaken, Dagh Ziaret."

"No. The globe—wait. There may be——"

Muttering, he shuffled toward a table. He lifted the black cloth, revealing a crystal sphere, larger than a man's head, transparent and glittering in the lamplight.

"Sit down, *effendi.* There is a message, I think. Look. Already the globe clouds. . . ."

Smiling tolerantly, Gerard took his seat on one side of the table. The Persian sat across from him. The man's features were distorted through the crystal sphere. . . .

And the crystal clouded. It grew milkily translucent. Slowly the face of Dagh Ziaret faded from view.

The Persian whispered, "The mists whirl and whirl. I see nothing clearly. Shadows. . . ."

"I do not even see those."

Dagh Ziaret lifted his head sharply. "You see nothing? Truly?"

"Nothing but clouds within the crystal."

The Persian drew in his breath with a hissing sound. "There is a reason why this is hidden from you. Simeon Gerard, I see birds circling. . . ." The thin voice grew shrill, chanting. "Great birds that swoop against the sky, their cruel beaks open to rend and tear . . . there are vultures in the crystal, *effendi!* Birds of evil omen. . . ."

Despite himself, Gerard could not repress a slight chill. Impatiently he thrust his chair back and rose, wincing at a new twinge of pain. "Enough of that," he said harshly. "I have business to transact with you, Dagh Ziaret."

The Persian replaced the black cloth. He, too, seemed uneasy. Rubbing his hands together, he glanced around and muttered, "In what way can I serve you?"

Carefully, measuring his words, Gerard spoke. "You have given me many drugs in the past. One of them sent my soul into a strange paradise——"

"A paradise? Nay!" And Dagh Ziaret cackled mirthlessly. "Those who serve Ahriman may not enter any paradise!"

"You sent out my soul, nevertheless. This is truth?"

"It is indeed truth."

"And my soul returned to my body. So. Now, Dagh Ziaret, what if it had instead entered another body?"

The Persian smiled, made a deprecating gesture. "This is madness. You cannot——"

Gerard held the other with his cold stare. "I too have learned much. And I know that it is *not* madness."

"I tell you that it is impossible."

"Impossible? With the blood of the black goat and the passion of the crucified serpent, and with——" Gerard leaned forward and whispered in the other's ear.

The Persian's dark face twisted. He ran shaking fingers through his beard. "Eh—you know of that? Yet the danger, *effendi*—we would walk on the brink of hell itself."

Gerard said, "I am rich."

"Aye. And I am poor. Now supposing that this thing can be done—that your mind and your soul can be made to enter into another body—what then?"

"Then I should not die," Gerard smiled. "And you would be wealthy indeed."

"There was death in your eyes," Dagh Ziaret whispered, "and vultures in the crystal."

"That is my affair. Give me your answer."

The Persian nodded slowly. "I will aid you. But I think Hell-Gate opens before us, *effendi!*"

2

SIMEON GERARD'S interview with his attorney was short and conclusive. The man had at first been inclined to argue, but presently gave up the unequal struggle and took his leave, the vital signed documents in his brief-case. Ten minutes after he left, the doorbell rang, and Gerard answered it himself. He had dismissed the servants for the night.

It was his nephew, Steven, a tall, husky blond, who made a precarious living selling insurance and looked on his uncle with somewhat puzzled distaste. Beside him was a girl, slim and pretty, something curiously elfin in her small, heart-shaped face, about which auburn ringlets clustered.

Gerard said, "Come in, both of you." There was a little frown between his eyebrows, however, and Steven was quick to notice this.

"I — well, this is my fiancée, Jean Sloane," he said, rather ill at ease. "We were going out tonight, and I thought—we have tickets for a play, you see——"

Gerard acknowledged the introduction and led his guests into the great room where the fire, replenished, blazed up hotly. "Some sherry?" he suggested. "Solera—excellent stuff."

The boy and the girl sipped their drinks in silence. Gerard sat quietly, his eyes dwelling with a curiously gloating satisfaction on the strong young body of his nephew. Steven was young—good! He was healthy—even better!

"I have had bad news," Gerard said suddenly. "My physician tells me I will die in a month." He waved down the shocked expression of sympathy. "That does not trouble me. I have already engaged passage to the Orient. I wish to die there, and, since I shall not return from that voyage, I am taking steps to dispose of my property. I have turned it over to you, Steven—all of it."

Before the dumfounded young man could answer, Gerard turned to Jean Sloane. "I must apologize to you, for I am afraid I must spoil your evening. Naturally there is much I must discuss with Steven, and I have so little time——"

"Of course," the girl said hesitantly. "I *am* sorry, Mr. Gerard."

"Death comes to all," Gerard said sententiously, and thought to himself, "I'm playing the dying patriarch rather well." He went on, "I'll call a cab——"

Five minutes later the two men were alone. Gerard, eyeing his nephew sharply, stood up. "Come with me, Steven. There is something I must show you."

The boy followed his uncle along the hall, and into a luxuriously furnished bedroom. Gerard touched the wall, and a panel slid aside. "A private elevator, Steven. Come."

Staring, the other took his place beside the old man. He gave Gerard an inquiring glance as the elevator began to drop slowly.

"Er—what's downstairs?"

"My private workroom. See?"

Gerard opened the door. Steven took a step forward—and halted, aghast.

He looked upon the temple of the dark god Ahriman.

Dim and strange and very terrible it lay before him, a great room of black marble, cloudy with incense, dimly lit by flickering gleams of eery radiance. Priceless tapestries hung upon the walls; rugs of incredible beauty were underfoot, woven in Bokhara and Turkistan and the far places of the world. A low ramp led up to a dais on which an altar lay like a crouching beast.

It was utterly silent.

Steven's voice was shocked as he said softly, "Good Lord—what *is* this?"

"I have told you. My workroom."

"What is this place?" the boy repeated.

Gerard looked at him sharply. Steven was standing rigid, swaying a little. The old man lifted his hand and moved it slowly toward the other's face. Steven did not stir or even blink.

"Do you hear me?" Gerard said loudly.

There was no answer. The boy stared before him, his eyes blank and expressionless.

A bent, dark figure shuffled into view. Dagh Ziaret croaked, "You gave him the powder?"

"In the sherry. Yes."

"Good. All is ready." The Persian gripped Steven's hand and led the unresisting youth toward the altar. Gerard followed. He was trembling a little. He took a sharp knife from his pocket and laid it carefully on a brazier.

STEVEN lay motionless upon the altar. The Persian stood above him, taloned hands moving in strange, archaic gestures.

Gerard said hoarsely, "Be careful! He must not die! There must be no risk of an accusation of murder."

Dagh Ziaret's face did not change; it wore an expression of rapt, almost ecstatic withdrawal. He pointed to the altar.

Gerard stretched himself at full length upon it.

From his position he could see the coiling mosaic designs on the low ceiling, flickering and retreating in the unsteady light. The smoke of incense slid up endlessly, endlessly. . . .

Dagh Ziaret bared Gerard's breast. On the sallow skin a scarlet design was visible, a crescent-shaped brand he had borne since his first visit to Persia, when he had been marked for ever as a servant of Ahriman.

A knife in Dagh Ziaret's hand brought a few drops of blood from the crimson sign.

The Persian reached for a chalice. He lifted it to Gerard's lips.

"Drink deep!"

The liquid was pungent and heady. The fumes mounted into Gerard's brain. He lay back as the Persian began a thin, high chanting, and stared up at the mosaic on the ceiling.

The incense thickened. Save for Dagh Ziaret's voice, it was very still. A strange coldness began to pervade the air.

The temple seemed darker, now.

And the mosaics move . . . move . . . swayed and crept in the gloom, taking unearthly shapes before Gerard's drugged vision. A shadow grew slowly more distinct. . . .

The shadow of a great bird, hovering. . . .

3

CONSCIOUSNESS came back to Gerard slowly. For a time he lay motionless, desperately trying to fight down a racking sickness that nauseated him. Alternate waves of heat and frigid cold seemed to drive into his brain, in a never-ending monotony of pain. How long he lay thus he did not know; at last a warm, sweetish liquid trickled down his throat, and the agony subsided.

But it was nearly half an hour before he gathered his strength sufficiently to open his eyes and sit up. The light in the underground temple had faded, he thought, and the tripods of the braziers were shadows in the gloom. There was no sign of Dagh Ziaret.

Gerard slowly stood up, every muscle and joint aching. As though drawn by a magnet his gaze went to the altar from which he had arisen.

A man lay there—a withered, shrunken oldster, sunken eyelids closed, his clothing opened to bare a flaming scarlet mark on the sallow chest.

Simeon Gerard looked upon himself!

For a moment the overwhelming magnitude of the thing drained all emotion from him. He stood quite silent, looking down at the shriveled figure on the altar.

He had won! The Persian's sorcery had not failed. The mind and soul of Simeon Gerard dwelt now in the strong, youthful body of Steven.

He had cheated—death!

Gerard laughed exultantly. He stretched out his muscular arms and examined them; he ran shaking fingers across a face from which all the wrinkles had gone. He touched smooth, glossy hair — not the scanty, brittle crop he had formerly possessed.

A low laugh sounded. From the shadows came Dagh Ziaret, discolored teeth bared in a grin. The Persian cackled, "It is finished, *effendi.*"

Gerard nodded. He had a brief awkwardness in finding his voice, and, when he spoke, the tone was strange to him.

"It is finished. *Selah.* But what of—him?" He indicated the body on the altar.

"He, too, lives. Do you wish me to——"

"No," Gerard said swiftly. "I have made my own arrangements."

"Good. Now——" The Persian brought out a vial filled with crystalline white powder. "Take this. Once each six days dissolve a pinch of it in your wine. I shall give you more when this is used." He came close, gripping Gerard's arm and peering up into the man's eyes. "Do not fail in this! For a year you must use this powder; then you will be safe. But if you stop before the year is up—it will not be well for you, *effendi.*"

Gerard placed the vial carefully in his pocket. "Is that all?"

"Almost. My—my reward?"

"Your fee was exorbitant." Gerard hesitated, and then went on swiftly as he noticed the expression that sprang suddenly into the Persian's eyes. "But I shall pay it gladly. I must convert some securities into cash first, though. In a week——"

"As you wish," Dagh Ziaret murmured. "I trust you. You will pay me." He reached out a skinny hand and meaningly tapped the pocket containing the vial of white powder.

Gerard said nothing as the other turned and shuffled into the shadows. Presently the click of a lock told of the Persian's departure.

Then Gerard went back to the altar and carefully examined the man who lay upon it. He nodded in satisfaction. The stertorous breathing was becoming stronger.

One thing remained to do. There was a knife he had brought down here with him . . . here it was, on this brazier. It was razor-sharp. Gerard had chosen the weapon carefully.

Silently, a black shadow in the dimness, he turned and stalked back to the altar. A random gleam of light flickered on bright steel.

Dagh Ziaret had said that when Steven awoke his brain would be clouded, warped almost to madness by the shock of the psychic operation. Yet the Persian might be wrong. Steven might waken sane—and might talk.

Gerard bent low, his fingers tightening on the knife. He fumbled in the gloom, felt leathery skin and the cavity of an open, almost toothless mouth.

No—Steven must not be allowed to talk. He must never speak again. . . .

4

SEATED before the great mirror in his bedroom, Simeon Gerard lit a cigarette and watched the image exhale smoke in luxurious puffs. A fine, strong, youthful image. No doubt it had never before smoked such expensive cigarettes, Gerard thought wryly. Indeed, he was doing this young body a great favor—initiating it to the delights of the epicure and the gourmet.

There was a keen, almost sensuous pleasure in watching the mirrored figure and comparing it, mentally, with the withered, diseased body he had worn before. As for Steven—well, no doubt he was already on the ship that would take him to the Orient, from which he would never return. The man who had taken Steven in charge had said nothing, though he had stared at the bloodstains around the mouth.

As Dagh Ziaret had said, it was finished. A new life, literally, lay before Simeon Gerard.

Dagh Ziaret — Gerard smiled a little ironically. The Persian really believed he would receive his fee. Well, that was his mistake. There was no hurry, however. For a few days Gerard planned to seclude himself in his home, getting accustomed to this strange new body. After that——

He could live again—live, indeed, unhampered by ruined and pain-racked flesh. Once more he could indulge in the strange delights he had learned, often too late to make use of them. He would go back to India, Persia, Egypt—but not yet! First a few years in Paris, Nice, the Riviera, and then to the Orient, with no danger of meeting Steven. Even a few months' grace would be enough. Steven, in the dying body he had acquired, could not live that long.

An annunciator rang. Gerard touched a button. The voice of one of his servants said, "Miss Sloane is on the telephone."

Miss Sloane? Who?—then Gerard remembered. Steven's fiancée. This was an unexpected development.

"I'll take the call," he said, and reached for the telephone.

"Hello?"

The girl's voice said, "Oh, is this you, Steve? I was worried when you didn't call."

Gerard frowned. He must play this part perfectly. Luckily, he was an excellent actor.

"Sorry, Jean," he said. "My uncle packed up and went off last night. Left me in charge of the house. I'd intended to phone you, but I just didn't get around to it."

"He's gone?" The girl seemed astonished. "That's strange."

"Not really. He explained it all to me—but I'll tell you all about it tonight. Suppose you meet me"—Gerard thought for a moment, and then named a quiet, good restaurant in the vicinity—"about eight?"

"Yes . . . all right, Steve. I'll see you then."

Gerard replaced the receiver. His eyebrows quirked up sardonically. This might not be so awkward after all.

"No doubt Steven has already proposed to her," he thought. "Well—I shall not back out of the bargain, then." It would be intriguing to explore the scented labyrinth of evil once more, to marry the girl, take her to Europe and the Orient, and to initiate her into the dark lore. . . .

A WEEK passed. All had gone smoothly. Jean Sloane had suspected nothing; Gerard had played his part well. He had not allowed himself to see the girl often, pleading pressure of work. One unexpected bit of good news had arrived. The ship on which Steven was a passenger had gone down in a storm on the China Sea, and he was not among the survivors, according to newspaper reports. Curiously enough, on the night the boat sank Gerard had had a vague but impressive dream of which, on awakening, he could only recall that it was somehow connected with a turmoil of wind and waves.

On the sixth day of his new life Gerard dissolved a pinch of the white powder in Amontillado and drank the wine slowly, noticing that the taste and bouquet were improved rather than harmed. He noted, too, that the vial held but little of the powder, and decided to call on Dagh Ziaret.

The Persian moved with alacrity as he led Gerard to the underground laboratory. He shuffled about hurriedly, lighting the oil lamps, coughing occasionally in the thick air.

Then he came to stand across the table from Gerard, his swarthy face alight with anticipation.

"You have the money?"

"Of course." Gerard took a bulky envelope from his pocket and held it carelessly as he went on. "I've broken the vial you gave me, Dagh Ziaret. The powder's gone, I'm afraid. You'd better give me some more."

The Persian caught his breath. "You took some yesterday? Eh?" Stark fear showed in the man's eyes.

"Yes. But in five days—well!" Gerard shrugged.

Muttering, Dagh Ziaret moved to a shelf and lifted down a large glass jar filled with the crystalline powder. Gerard's lips twitched. More than a year's supply there!

Carefully the Persian measured a small amount from the jar. Gerard came to stand behind him. His hand was hidden inside his coat.

Dagh Ziaret started to whirl, as though warned by some strange instinct. But he was too late. Gerard struck.

The knife entered cleanly between the ribs. There was little blood. The Persian coughed chokingly, tried to speak, and then slid down boneless to the floor. His nails ripped at the blackened planks.

Then he lay motionless.

Gerard, about to recover the knife, paused as a footstep sounded hollowly from above. A customer was in the Persian's shop. With a little start Gerard remembered that Dagh Ziaret had failed to lock the metal door.

He glanced down at the Persian, stirred the man's body with his foot. There was no response. Frowning, Gerard carefully slipped through the door and tiptoed up the narrow stairway till he could command a view of the shop.

A woman was there, fat and overdressed, holding a vase in her pudgy hands. She looked around impatiently, rapped on a table. Gerard whispered a

silent curse. Then he froze as the customer, with an angry shrug, marched heavily toward him.

Before she had a chance to reach the door Gerard opened it and stepped out. "Can I help you, madame?" he asked.

"Why don't you pay attention to your business?" the woman snapped. "I've been here for half an hour!"

Gerard repressed an impulse to call her a liar. He apologized instead. "Do you wish to buy this vase?"

"How much is it?"

"Er—ten dollars." It was worth much more, but Gerard's only wish was to get rid of the woman. His ruse succeeded, for she fumbled in her purse, found a bill, and thrust it at him, with a card.

"Send it to this address."

Gerard held the vase till the woman's footsteps died on the pavement outside. Then, dropping it on a table, he whirled and raced down the stairway. The metal door was closed.

He gave it an impatient push, but it did not yield. Frowning, Gerard tried to move the latch, with no result. He hesitated, struck by a sudden inexplicable fear, listening.

A faint crackling and roaring came to his ears. Gerard suddenly lunged forward, bracing his shoulder against the door, straining until veins bulged on his forehead.

Useless! He tried the latch again, rattling it in its socket. And, abruptly, the door moved and swung open under his hand.

Simultaneously a blast of raving, searing flame poured out through the portal. Gerard leaped back, his eyes distended. Through the doorway he saw that the underground room was ablaze. It was already a furnace, and fire poured out hungrily from the mouths of several great jars that lay overturned on the floor. Beyond the threshold was the body of Dagh Ziaret, his face a cindery, blackened horror, one hand still gripping an overturned and broken lamp.

To attempt to enter the room would be madness and suicide. Gerard stood quite motionless until the spreading flames drove him back. Then, his lips gray, he ascended the stairs, walked through the shop, and let himself out into the street.

As he walked homeward he whispered, "I should have made sure he was dead . . . damn him! Damn him!"

5

NOW Simeon Gerard entered the last phase of the affair. He had, of course, lied to Dagh Ziaret; the little vial of white powder had not been broken. But it contained a pitiably small amount of the priceless stuff.

Gerard gave a chemist a niggardly portion to be analyzed. He sent a dozen telegrams to men who might conceivably know what the powder contained. He pored over his immense library and pounced on every relevant reference—but there were all too few.

And, most of all, he wondered. What would happen when the supply of the drug failed?

He determined to find out. On the twelfth day after the experiment he left the vial unopened in his safe. There were no apparent ill-effects, save for an increasing drowsiness during an evening spent with Jean Sloane. He took her home early and was nearly asleep before the taxicab stopped at his door.

A short while later, clad in dressing-gown and pajamas, he stood hesitating before the safe. But at last he shrugged and went to his bedroom.

Almost immediately Gerard was asleep. He had an extraordinary dream, confused and distorted, in which he seemed first to be clinging to an overturned lifeboat,

chilled by frigid waves that showered over him; and then he seemed to be in a dory, looking up at several unshaved faces that loomed above him. After that the dream became chaotic. There were visions of a ship—a tanker—on which he was apparently a passenger; there were sunlit far shores that slipped past and were gone; and at last Gerard saw in the distance the buildings of a city he recognized. It was Bushire, on the Persian Gulf.

No sooner had he realized this than he awoke, shivering and sweating. Moonlight fingered in wanly through the windows. The house was quite silent.

Gerard was still shuddering uncontrollably as he found his slippers and hurried to the safe. Not until he had swallowed a pinch of the white powder in a glass of wine did he dare to let his thoughts dwell on the dream.

Superficially there was nothing about the nightmare to terrify him. But all the while Gerard had been conscious of a certain indefinable familiarity—an *inward* familiarity—which filled him with genuine horror. In his dream, he realized, he had seemed to be back in his former body, ravaged and dying by years of evil. How he knew this he could not have said, but know it he did, unmistakably.

Sitting by a hurriedly-kindled fire, drawing great mouthfuls of smoke into his lungs, Gerard pondered. What, then, was the effect of the white powder? To prevent him from dreaming such things? Scarcely; there was more to it than that.

Why had Dagh Ziaret been so insistent that Gerard take the drug regularly for a year? Could it be that invisible psychic bonds were still striving to draw his mind and soul back to his former body?

'Good God—*no!*

Gerard rose hastily, tossed his cigarette into the fire, and found a bottle of sleeping-tablets. Whether through the virtue of these or of the white powder, he had no more dreams that night and awoke refreshed and inclined to shrug away his previous fears.

But doubt still troubled him. He recalled the name of the tanker on which, in his dream, he had been a passenger—the *Yasmina.* And that morning he sent a cable to Bushire.

In due time the response came. The *Yasmina,* an oil tanker, had docked a few days before. In the log was a report that a castaway had been picked up in the China Sea—a half-paralyzed and imbecilic old man who was white-skinned, and whose tongue had been removed. In Bushire the man had wandered ashore and vanished; no trace of him had been found.

Gerard dared send no more cables. Obviously his former body, with the mind and soul of Steven within it, had survived the shipwreck—had been rescued by the seamen of the *Yasmina.*

Greatly worried, Gerard redoubled his effort to discover the nature of the mysterious drug. The chemists could give him no help; there were elements in the powder that defied analysis. Telegrams arrived, and they, too, were valueless. Some of Gerard's correspondents had heard of the drug, but none could give him the information he needed. Nor could he find any clues in his volumes on goety and in his *grimoires.*

Gerard sent more telegrams. Meanwhile he forced himself to live a normal sort of life; he spent considerable time with Jean, and began to frequent the night clubs. This, however, was only a passing phase, and it did not last long.

Swiftly the powder in the vial dwindled. Gerard took smaller and smaller amounts, and increased the length of time between doses. The dreams began to recur, but he tried to forget them. There was one vision in which he seemed to be wandering through the streets of Bushire, and another in which he walked on and

on through a wilderness of mountainous barrenness. And then there was a dream of Persian nomads who stared at the scarlet symbol on his breast, and placed him carefully in a litter and carried him north.

What was the real significance of the visions? If, as Gerard suspected, he temporarily returned to his former body, the mystery was only half solved. How could a dying old man survive a shipwreck and a mad journey into the arid Persian desertlands?

There was one possible explanation; the youthful mind of Steven might have infused, through some strange psychic bond, additional vigor to the ravaged, diseased body. Dagh Ziaret had said that Steven would be insane. And, truly, only a madman would have set out from Bushire into the heart of Persia.

As Gerard forced himself to take less and less of the drug, his dreams came with increasing frequency and vividness. The nomads were gone now, and he was in a hut in a little village that lay between tall mountains. An old man attended his wants, daily anointing the red brand of Ahriman with an oily, stinging substance. Once, when the Persian's robe gaped, Gerard saw a similar design on the bronzed flesh.

At first, in the dreams, Gerard seemed paralyzed. Later he gained some control of his body, and at this the Persian was pleased. Yet worn-out muscles often failed to respond, and the slightest movement brought on exhaustion.

Once Gerard tried to talk to his attendant, but only succeeded in making a hoarse croaking sound. Then he remembered how he had made certain Steven would never speak again. . . .

FOR several days now Gerard had not seen Jean. She rang the doorbell one night and brushed past him, her chin raised and determined. Gerard followed her to the library, where she sat down and looked at him intently.

"Steve," she began, "you're sick. I can tell that. If you won't call a doctor, I will."

Gerard was indeed ill. His eyes burned with fever brightness; his face was drawn and gray with exhaustion. For two days now the last of the powder had been gone, and he had been dosing himself with caffein and benzedrin in a frantic effort to keep awake.

He sat down, lighting a cigarette and taking short, nervous puffs. "Jean," he said slowly, "I can't explain. I don't want a doctor, though. . . ."

He had intended to say more, but despite himself Gerard's eyelids sank. The warmth of the room, the soft cushions of the chair, were deadly soporifics.

Suddenly conscious of his danger, he tried to rouse himself. But already it was a tremendous effort to open his eyes. His head lolled forward. . . .

Deep in his mind a frantic voice shrilled, *"Wake up!"* But it was too late.

Simeon Gerard slept.

Jean eyed the man for a moment. Then she stood up and gently eased Gerard back to a more comfortable position.

At the touch of her hands he moaned and stirred sleepily. His eyes opened. For a moment they stared, blank and blind; and then there was a soul behind them once more.

"Jean!" the man whispered. "I—what's happened? How did I get here?"

She drew back. "Steve—don't you know me?"

"Of course. But the last I remember Uncle Simeon took me down to a temple or something under the house, and—where is he?"

"Your uncle? He's been gone for months, Steve!"

Steven remembered nothing since he had entered the temple of Ahriman. Of

his long weeks in the Orient, those torturing days of insanity, he knew nothing. During that period his mind had been gone. But now it had returned. . . .

"Amnesia," he said at last. "It must have been that."

6

SIMEON GERARD awoke. He lay looking up at an illimitable blue expanse, dazed and frightened. Once more the frightful dream had him in its toils. But it was different now. He was no longer within the squalid little hut. . . .

No, he had not been there during the last dream, either. There had been a long chanting procession through the night, while torches flamed in the cold wind that blew down from the snow-topped mountains . . . a procession in which he had been borne in an open litter. The Persians had taken him toward the high tower beyond the village, had begun to climb a ramp of steps that wound about it . . . and had left him there, staring up at the stars. Then he had awakened.

A chanting procession . . . and a tower in Persia . . . and a man who lay motionless upon its summit. These meant something vitally important, Gerard felt. The old Persian had led the villagers, and his deep voice had rolled out in sonorous syllables. He had intoned—

The Call of Ahriman! The Prayer for the Dead!

But that was madness. He wasn't dead. He could still think and feel. . . .

But could he?

Now Gerard realized that he seemed to have no feeling whatever in his body. Nor could he move or even close his eyes. He lay outstretched, stiff and immobile, staring up. Suppose Steven had died here in Persia. Could the soul of Simeon Gerard be drawn back to a corpse?

No, he wasn't dead. He couldn't be. Yet, straining and trying frantically to move even a muscle, Gerard realized that he was completely paralyzed. His body seemed to be without feeling.

A shadow moved against the blue. A bird was circling, far above. It dropped lower.

And other shadows came, till there were dozens of the things circling, circling . . . and Gerard remembered the hovering, indistinct outline he had seen on the roof of the temple of Ahriman, as well as the vision Dagh Ziaret had seen in his crystal. What had the Persian said?

I see birds circling . . . great birds that swoop against the sky. . . .

The shadows dropped toward the tower.

There are vultures in the crystal, effendi!

A frightful shock of cold horror flamed through Gerard. With a grinding, fearful effort he succeeded in turning his head very slightly; the strain left him drained of all vitality and utterly helpless.

And now he saw the summit of the tower around him.

Four skeletons lay near-by, fleshless, white, grinning up in grim mockery. Quite suddenly Gerard realized the truth.

This was the Tower of Silence . . . one of the towers on which the Persians, according to their religion, exposed their dead. Since fire and earth were too sacred to be contaminated with human flesh, corpses were left upon the Towers of Death, to the sun and the wind and—the vultures!

The birds came down swiftly, sensing helpless prey. There was a flapping of great wings; a vulture swept above Gerard, and the man, half insane with horror, thought: *Thank God, I can feel nothing now!* Where before he had shrunk from the thought that his soul might be inhabiting a corpse, he now welcomed the idea gladly.

Silence, and a cold wind blowing from the snow-topped mountains of Persia.

Silence, save for the beat of great wings. The birds were all around him now. A naked, scabrous neck and a vicious beak came into Gerard's range of vision. . . .

Quite suddenly the vultures dropped, their outspread wings almost hiding the man's body. Gerard saw a swift beak striking down. . . .

He had been wrong. He could still feel pain.

Bogey-Man

By CHARLES SLOAN REID

On moldy tombs he danced at eve,
  At midnight bowled with great pine cones;
At morn, ere darkness took its leave,
He played croquet with dead men's bones.

Uncanonized

By SEABURY QUINN

A tale of werewolfery and a weird romance—an enthralling story of the horror that struck by night

GRAY-BLUE and pungent-sweet, the scent of leaf smoke floated on the breeze that wandered lazily across the valley; from the larches growing on the farther hills the cuckoo's call, a little sad, a little mocking, drifted softly as the echo of a half-heard echo. Little animals, too insignificant to merit chase, looked startled-eyed from the long roadside grass as young Graf Otho Hohenschuh rode through the gathering dusk with his companions. They had been hawking since the cock had trumpeted his salutation to the morning; now, with game bags filled and palates dry with thirst, they sought the comfort of the Pulitzberg, the slippery, thirst-annihilating Reingau and the roasted joints of venison and brawn. With Otho rode his saddlemates and cup-comrades, Hans Richnau, Emil von Dessaur and Werther von der Plücher, free-landed, towered *junkers* like himself, gallant riders and good swordsmen, mighty workers with the trencher or the flagon, and ruthless and acquisitive as the hooded hawks which they had coursed that day.

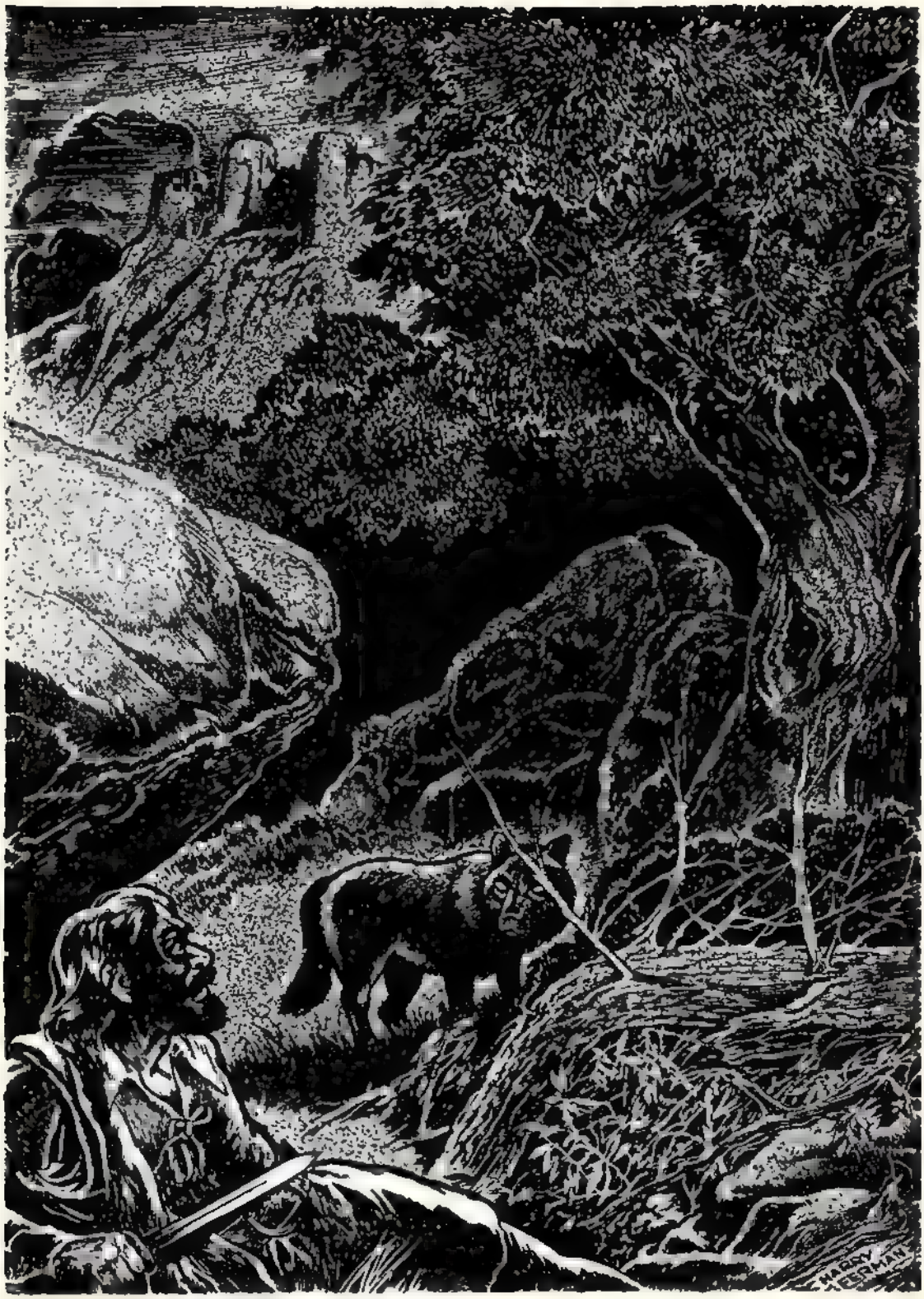
"'Fore God," exclaimed von Dessaur as they cantered toward the cleared lands, "meseems this road grows longer as we wend it! I am thirsted till I scarce can speak——"

"Then husband thy breath," laughed von Hohenschuh. "'Tis nigh three leagues until we reach the Berg, and thou'lt be choken to the death ere then. Now, if thy dainty throat could forgo wine and be content with home-brewed ale——"

"Mary Mother, I would e'en take milk and pull no face on tasting it!" the other interrupted. "Stretch forth thy rod and smite the rock whence small beer floweth, oh, Moses!"

Graf Otho turned into a lane that crossed the ancient Roman road and led directly to the valley. "The farmerers make Harvest Home," he threw across his shoulder. "'Twill be a shame and a reproach if they've not beer and bread to give us."

THE countryside was out in force. Farmerers, crofters, freedmen, carls and villeins had turned out like an army for the gathering-in of corn; now, the wheat-heads gleaned and straw in ordered stacks, they made a feast of Harvest Home at the grange of Wolfgang the franklin. All day, from sun-up to late twilight, the mowers had weaved back and forth across the fields of standing wheat and rye, and after labor came refreshment. Whole-roasted pigs and sheep and oxen, chickens, ducks and geese, long loaves of wheaten and rye bread and cauldronfuls of cabbage boiled with fat-back disappeared almost as if by magic, and barrel after barrelful of ale and spice-tanged cider foamed and frothed into the pewter pots and earthen steins as the women made their rounds from group to group of feasting peasants; for Wolfgang the franklin spread the feast for his tenants and neighbors and it would be a shame to him if any left his farmstead able to look at a bite of food or sup of



"It gave him a long look that made the scalp creep on his skull."

ale or cider other than with feelings of disgust.

He had been cast in a heroic mold, this Wolfgang. Six feet three inches he stood in woolen hosen, and his weight was fourteen stone; yet nowhere on him was an ounce of fat, and though he scarce could form the letters of his name, his was the best hand with the scythe or quarter-staff or grisarme in all the countryside.

Beside him on the oaken bancal sat his bride-betrothed, Gertruda, daughter of Humboldt the crofter, and next to them was stout Friar Hilderbrandt who when the feast was done should make them man and wife.

Hilderbrandt was godly, though not saintly. Saints were woven of a tougher fiber, better able to resist the promptings of the flesh. As one who trod the common ways of common men and shared their joys and sorrows he was ever aware of the world, and he did not disdain it. He was a mighty worker at the table, his girdle spanned a waist an ell in compass, and he could toss pots with the strongest-headed drinker in the parish and still be thirsty and sure-footed when his cup-companion snored beneath the table. Now, as befitted one who knew not only the Four Gospels intimately, but the savor of good fare as well, he occupied the seat of master of the revels.

"Laus Deo!" he exclaimed with pious fervor, emptying his pint-cup at a draft and sighing gustily as he wiped his foam-flecked lips upon his cassock cuff. *"Laus Deo,* amen! Nay, wench, be not so hasty——" as the girl cup-bearer was about to move along with laden tray. "Another cup to keep the first one company, and then a third in honor of the blessed Trinity. Wot ye not what good Aquinas saith, *videlicet—in nomine Domini,* here be noble visitors!"

The peasants' shouting merriment ceased abruptly as Otho and his comrades clattered into the barn court, and every feaster rose and stood respectfully to hear the young graf's pleasure.

"Ach Gott, are we a pestilence that ye leave off pleasuring at sight of us?" the Count demanded testily. "Nay, Wolfgang," as the franklin left his place and came to hold his liege lord's stirrup, "let merriment proceed. We be four thirsty-throated men come for a stoup of ale. Ye would not give a beggar less, methinks.

"Ho, musickers," he waved a gloved hand to the knot of rustics who with viol and flute and tambour gathered at the barn door, "to work! Let's see the harvest dance and hear the strain of your sweet instruments!"

A peasant maiden hurried forward with a tray of pewter mugs and Richnau, von Dessaur and von der Plücher tossed bottoms up and belched with gusty relish, but Hohenschuh waved the cup aside. "Am I to be served by a field wench?" he asked, his dark eyes on Wolfgang's affianced bride. "Will not the mistress of the revels deign to bring me drink in her fair hands?"

A blush swept up Gertruda's slim pale throat and mounted to her cheeks and brow as with downcast eyes she left her place and bore a foaming ale mug to von Hohenschuh. "Will not your lordship dismount and take place at table?" she asked in a low voice. "It is not fitting that——"

"Nay, *mädchen,* I have but time for this"—he interrupted as he took the ale mug from between her hands and drained it at a single long-drawn draft—"and this!" He tossed the empty pot away so that it rang and bounced and clanged against the kidney stones of the barn court, and bending from his saddle set a bent forefinger underneath her chin and kissed her on the upturned lips.

And as he laughed again to see the quick blood burning in her face the music started, and to the rhythm of the tambour

and the tune of viol and flute and flageolet the youths and maidens took their places for the dance.

"By the bones of good Saint Hubert, patron of the chase, I'll stop to tread a measure!" declared Hohenschuh and swung down from the saddle.

THEY made a gallant couple with the torchlight and the bonfires' flickering beams upon them. Hohenschuh was tall and dark and handsome as the Devil's self with his sleek hair, his tiny black mustache and the little tuft of black hair on his nether lip. His doublet was of Saxon green, cinctured tightly at the waist by a broad leathern belt, and falling almost to the knees in heavy pleats cross-stitched with gold; on his legs were high-laced boots of soft brown hide which came up to the chausses of green fustian that encased his thighs. He wore no sword, but at his belt there hung a heavy dirk-knife in a scabbard of brown leather set with gold.

Gertruda, daughter of the crofter Humboldt, was lovely as the lily-spear from which she took her name. Her hair was fair with the bright sheen that ripened wheat stalks have at harvest time, and as the harvest queen she wore it unbound and unplaited, save for the wreath of cornflowers bound about her brow. Underneath the blossom fillet looked two deep blue eyes with a sweet, trusting frankness that proclaimed her spirit pure and virginal as her slim young body. Faint responsive roses bloomed in either cheek and seemed to cast a shadow of their color down her slender, graceful neck. In her gown of deep-blue linen, touched with bands of white at throat and wrist, with the glory of the firelight burnishing her unbound hair, she seemed as chaste and other-wordly as a carven angel set in a carven niche.

"Kreuzsakrament," Graf Otho swore as he completed the dance and turned to mount his charger while Wolfgang, as was meet, stood by to hold his stirrup, "thou art the lucky one, my Wolfgang! Would that I might bide here to see thee wed this flower-maid"—Gertruda's lashes dropped demurely, and a deeper flush dyed her flushed cheeks as his dark eyes looked down into her blue ones—"but business at the Berg impels my presence thither. Howbeit, see thou to it that thou bring'st the molmen and thy bride into the castle hall ere thou hast smelled the flowers of the bride-bed."

"Tonight, my lord? Certes, thou knowest well I will not fail to bring the silver, but we wed within the hour, and the Pulitzberg is three leagues distant——"

"Tonight, my Wolfgang," broke in young Graf Otho. "It is my pleasure that I have the forfeit ere thou hast the maid."

Now it was the law, and had been since the days of Charlemagne the Great, that when a vassal wed, the lord of Pulitzberg, if he desired, might occupy the bridal chamber in the husband's stead upon the wedding night, and this was called the *droit du seigneur,* or lord's right. Not in the memory of living man had any lord of Pulitzberg exacted payment of the *droit* in kind. Graf Otho's father and grandfather and great-grandsire had compromised their claims for silver, and for more than ninety years a bag of thalers had been offered and accepted as a quit-claim settlement.

So Wolfgang louted low and bent his head in assent to his lord's command. "The silver shall be in thy hand before the castle horologe strikes ten, my liege," he promised.

AGAINST the purple backdrop of the night the Pulitzberg loomed like a darker shadow in the midst of shadows. Here and there a lighted window showed like an orange point pricked in the sky above the towering rim of the great rock on which the castle stood. From the ravine

where a rill ran brawling past the Berg's base rose the evening mist, whorl swirling lazily on whorl until the valley and the great trees growing on the lower slopes were shrouded like the sheeted dead, and through the thickening brume the harvest moon shone faintly, its golden light transmuted into faded silver by the gathering haze. The broad-flanked palfrey's hooves made rhythmic music on the roadway flints as Wolfgang with Gertruda on the pillion at his back rode at easy gait toward the castle.

Up from the ravine came a faint halloo as villeins' brats called back and forth across the rock-spiked gulch while they sought mollusks by the flare of rushlight torches. Gertruda clutched her husband's arm between convulsive hands and shuddered against the rough stuff of his jerkin.

"Art chilled, my sweetling?" he asked with a bridegroom's solicitude. "The mist is rising from the valley, but we shall be there eftsoons——"

"Nay, husband," came her whispered interruption, "it was no chill of night that shook me. I felt a sudden inward tremor, such as the old wives say we feel when one steps on the spot where we shall die. Oh, Wolfgang"—her hold upon his great arm tightened—"if I should die this night, upon my wedding eve—meseems this joy is too great to endure. What if it proves to be like fairy gold that turns to withered leaves and ashes in the holder's hand——"

"Tush, little silly one, what is there to be feared of? Am I not with thee——"

"Nathless, husband, I am frighted. The way the young graf looked at us ere we were wed——"

"Graf Otho, quotha?" Wolfgang's laugh drowned out her frightened, half-articulated words. "If we need fear no other more than him our path of life will be a smooth one, little bride o' mine. We be more than lord and liegeman, he and I. We be true friends and comrades, and have been since our youth. I am beholden to him for my lands, but he is debtor to me for his life. Think ye he would do us wrong?"

"His life? How sayest thou, Wolfgang?"

Again his chuckle answered her. " 'Twas when we were but lads scarce breeched that he and I went hunting in the woods beyond the Tanneberg. It was forbidden ground to us, for there were bears and wolves—aye, robbers, too—among those trees, but danger ever was more lure than warning to us. Eh, we had not gone far when we heard a crackling in the brush, and on the trail before us stood a monster old he-bear with yellow fangs and little eyes that glared with rage and hate. He was a roamer of the woods, that one, an outcast from his kind who mated not and killed whatever crossed his path. He had been searching for a honey-tree, but now he sought no honey.

"Graf Otho was a step before me, and when the bruin rushed at him he thrust out bravely with his boar-spear, but the monster struck the shaft aside as if it had been a reed, and towered over him a moment ere it dropped to rend him. But in that instant I let out a shout of mingled rage and fear and hurled a stone which struck the beast square on its tender snout so that it turned on me instead."

Gertruda snuggled closer to her bridegroom's massive shoulder and laid her cheek against the rough frieze of his jerkin. Her frightening premonitions were forgotten; surely she was safe with such a man for husband. "And wert thou not afeared?" she whispered breathlessly.

"Aye, more than ever I have been before or since, *weibchen*. When the brute turned on me I felt as if I had been stuffed with naught but water, and that aleak so sorely I must collapse like a burst wine-skin, but those who act the quickest live the longest in the wildwood, and, *Gott sei*

dank, I had the wit to act. So I drave with my grisarme straight at his hairy breast, and he did not snap my spear as he had lashed away Count Otho's; so the iron fleshed itself clear to the haft in him, and when he struck at me he stumbled over Otho's prostrate body so he fell upon the spire and broke the shaft, but drove the blade clear through him so it thrust out of his back. So he fell upon his side and kicked and moaned his life away.

"Then Otho and I named ourselves great huntsmen and the conquerors of monsters, and made shift to skin the brute and take its pelt and head for trophies. But ere we did this Otho thanked me graciously for my part in the work, and sware that from that day he was my true friend and companion, and that when we were men grown and he had reached his heritage there was nothing which I might ask that he would not give me freely. Think'st thou that we have aught to fear from him, my sweet? 'Tis but a whim that prompts him to exact the silver molmen on our bridal night instead of waiting for the payment as was the wont of his sire and grandsire."

GRAF OTHO sat at late meat with his cronies of the chase. The remnants of a roasted pig's face garnished with stewed plums, part of a haunch of venison and the remains of a cast of bread were on the table, and by the Count's hand stood a *cruye* of wine from which he replenished the silver rummers of himself and guests.

"Body o' Judas," swore von Dessaur between hiccups as his host renewed the ruby liquid in his flagon, "this is no Reingau, no vintage of our valleys. 'Tis sherris, as I'm a sinner hoping for the Lord His pardon, a very heading cup to steal the senses and befog the brain!"

Graf Otho smiled, a thin slow smile that raised his black mustaches at the corners of his mouth and showed a hard white line of teeth between his lips. "Mayhap 'tis conscience who is doomed to lay her neck upon the block tonight," he answered cryptically, his eyes upon a bear's head mounted on the wall. Then, to von Plücher: "What say'st thou, Ludwig, can promises be binding on a man of *gens* if made by him to a churl?"

Von der Plücher drew a deep draft from his rummer and considered gravely. "The churl and villein know not faith and honor," he decided at length. "Unless they take an oath upon the rood they cannot be bound to a promise. Meseems a man of gentle blood need not fulfill a promise made a carl unless he too hath sworn upon the cross or taken value for its giving." The others nodded solemn agreement as Hohenschuh refilled the cups.

"It was an old, decrepit beast," he muttered. "Belike I could have slain him unaided——"

"What say'st thou?" von Dessaur asked. "What beast, my Otho?"

"Eh? I did but mutter in my cup," returned Graf Otho. "Forgive me, friends, but I would be alone. I have somewhat to attend to ere the horologe strikes ten, and we must ride betimes upon the morrow."

One by one they rose and made unsteady bows and left him sitting in his oaken chair before the oaken table with the orange glare of rushlights brightening the blood-red of the spilled wine on its polished top.

WOLFGANG made a leg and Gertruda dropped a low, respectful curtsy when they came into the wide hall where Graf Otho sat alone before the broken meats and spattered wine.

"Here is the molmen, good my lord," the franklin announced as he slipped the thongs that held the leathern sack of silver to his girdle. "A hundred and fifty and

two broad thalers, minted with the picture of the angel Gabriel on 'em, as was paid by my sire to your sire and my grandsire to yours."

"Put by thy money, Wolfgang," ordered the Count with a smile. "Use it to buy a prettying for thy sweet bride; mayhap I shall give thee a like sum on the morrow or the day after——"

"Thou wert ever generous, my lord," Wolfgang's wide face broke into a smile as he put a hand out to retrieve the silver. But both the gesture and the smile were halted as Graf Otho finished speaking.

"——after I have had my marriage-rights as thy liege lord."

Wolfgang licked dry lips with a tongue that seemed to have gone dry all suddenly. "My lord is pleased to jest," he stammered thickly. His heavy fingers twisted and untwisted on each other; there was about him the air of a bewildered child.

"Nay, in good sadness, I am minded to assert my right and demand payment of the *droit* in kind," the Count returned, almost patiently. "Get thee to thy cot, good Wolfgang, and tomorrow when the cock hath crowed three times come thou to the castle gate for thy fair Gertruda. I can promise thee——"

"Aye, as thou didst promise long ago, when I saved thee from the ravening bear!" Wolfgang interrupted hotly. "On that day thou swore to be to me like any brother, and declared that whatsoever I might ask thee should be granted me. I claim thy promise now, Otho Hohenschuh. By the memory of our boyhood friendship, by the service which I did thee; by the sacredness of thy pledged word I conjure thee to let us go in peace, unscathed and undefiled. Take thy tale of silver as thy sire and grandsire did aforetime, and——" In his excess of emotion Wolfgang laid his hand upon the heavy hanger belted to his waist, and:

"Ho, guard, there!" cried Count Otho. "Seize me this varlet who hath offered violence in mine own hall. Set him in the inner dungeon and lock his feet fast in the stocks until I bid ye loose him!"

Surprised, but obedient, twenty men-at-arms came rushing to perform their master's bidding, and Wolfgang went down beneath an overpowering weight of burly armored bodies and the flailing of a score of fists.

Bound with a length of rope they set him on his feet and dragged him to the door, but ere they hustled him down to the dungeon cell he turned to shout: "Oath-breaker, perjurer, accursed of God and man; the doom of Judas be upon thee; may thou go to thy death unshriven and in fear——" A guardsman's gauntlet stopped his mouth, and, silenced and raging, but as helpless as a rabbit in a snare, they hurried him into the oubilette.

GERTRUDA faced the Count across the littered dining-board. Her pulses jumped like frightened hares with every quick-drawn breath, her heart was quivering and jerking like something in its death-throes. There was a dreadful, paralyzing weakness spreading through her, as if her insides were becoming unfastened. Her lower lip began to quiver and she caught it savagely between her teeth to hold it steady. The urge to pray rose in her, but she had no words to frame a prayer. God seemed terribly unreal . . . perhaps there was no God! Surely He would not let such things happen if He existed . . . what harm had she or Wolfgang ever done, what had they ever asked of Heaven but each other and a little time to enjoy life and love together?

Graf Otho's softly uttered, suave words called her from the trance of horror that enchained her. He spoke gently, with a sort of soft persuasion, as to a frightened child: "——the bridal couch is decked with flowers and a bedgown of the softest

silk from far Cathay waits to caress thy gentle form——"

She beat her breast with her left fist to still the frantic feeling which seemed spreading like a blood-stain in the sand to smother the wild palpitation of her heart. With her right hand she sawed a cross-sign in the air between them.

"Aroint thee, perjurer and foresworn friend," she gasped. "Come not near nor touch me——"

Graf Otho drew his breath in with a sibilating hiss. Her tense, pale face was set and immobile as the marble visage of a sculptured saint in the Cathedral at Cologne, but the glow of rushlights gleaming at her back shone through her wheat-blond hair and made it shine like minted gold, and the shadows of her brows gave added depth and luster to the deep blue of her eyes. The wench was fairer, even, than he'd thought.

"Nay, lovely 'Truda," he began to wheedle, "flee not from me in affright, I beseech thee. See, I will be thy tiring-woman——" He passed around the table and laid a hand upon her bodice, but she shook the lethargy of terror off and ran on faltering, stumbling feet to the wide windows overlooking the ravine that served the Pulitzberg in place of a moat.

"Back—back!" she panted as she halted by the casement. "Come but another step and I will throw myself——"

His laughter drowned her threat. "Not thou, my 'Truda—and mine thou art, as surely as the horse I stride or hound I course," he denied. "Look thou out and see what lies beyond that window, then say if thou'lt choose it instead of Otho Hohenschuh, his arms and lips."

Gertruda cast a timorous glance across the two-foot stone sill of the window-place. Two hundred feet and more below, the mountain rill, high-swollen by a steady week of rain that fell before the harvest period, ran clattering and bawling on the needle-points of rock, and at the edges of the flood the white foam steamed and glistened as if the very force of friction of the water on the boulders set it boiling. She drew away with a gasp, for the chasm seemed to call and beckon to her, but even as she shuddered back she felt his touch upon her shoulder.

"Hast made thy choice, Gertruda mine?" he asked so softly that she scarce could hear his words above the clamor of the water shouting on the rocks below.

"I thine?" she answered in a voice gone hoarse with loathing and disgust. "Thine, Otho Hohenschuh? Sooner would I give myself to Barran-Sathanas! Hear me, thou who perjured thy true word and requited the savior of thy life with perfidy—look in mine eyes and read in them thy doom—*heilige Maria!*" As Graf Otho's fingers tightened on her shoulder and he made to draw her into his embrace she thrust him back with all her feeble might, leapt to the window-sill and dropped herself into the abyss.

Out into the night she launched, a glimmer of white face and gleaming hair, pale hands clutching at the empty air, then turning slowly over as she fell.

Otho looked across the casement sill, his black eyes wide, his midriff twitching with incipient sickness. She lay face down upon the rocks that rimmed the swirling spray-plumed fall of a small cataract, her arms outstretched like those of a diver, her fair bright hair around her like an aureole and her head bent at an utterly impossible angle. He saw one of her slim hands move a little, as if to reach another with its clasp. Then the fingers opened slowly, like the petals of a wilting flower—and moved no more.

THEY buried her slight, broken body in a grave dug at the crossroads. Coffinless and shroudless they put her in the earth, garbed in the blood-stained gown

she wore upon her bridal night, with nothing but her bright hair for a winding-sheet. No linen bandages bound her chin, no cincture held her pale hands crossed upon her breast; there was neither bell nor book nor prayer nor perfumed incense at her burial, for as one self-slain she died outside the pale of religion, and might not have the holy office read for her, nor lie in consecrated ground. Her father and her mother stood afar off, weeping. Wolfgang labored in his fields, and took no more account of her burial than if it had been a stray dog they tumbled into the hole scooped out of the leaf-mold underneath the mighty oak that grew beside the crossways.

But in the dark of night when honest men lay snug abed with fires covered, prayers said and doors barred fast, there came one to the crossroads grave who knelt and clasped his hands and besought pardon for the wife-maid who had forfeited her soul to save her body from defilement, and, rising, made the sacred sign above the dark, unhallowed earth in which they had laid the suicide.

A kindly man was Friar Hilderbrandt, and, according to his lights, a godly one; but no saint. Saints were knitted of a tougher fiber; their love of God was all-exclusive. Hilderbrandt's love of his fellow creatures had more of earthiness than Paradise about it.

FROM the dark shadows of the Tanneberg to the sun-washed valleys of the farm lands spread the dreadful word: A werewolf was abroad!

Flocks were set upon and decimated, the stoutest-hearted sheep dogs ran with lowered tails and craven whines to the shelter of the farmhouse and the strongest bars were powerless to keep the monster from the folds.

A forester had met the devil-beast at night-fall as he hurried homeward through the Schwarzwald. Though he hewed at it with his short sword it overbore him with a mighty pounce and put its monstrous forepaws on his arms and pinned him helpless to the earth.

Then as he gave up hope and was commending himself to Heaven it took its muzzle from his throat and its great paws from his arms and trotted off into the bush. But ere it vanished it turned back and gave him a long look that made the scalp creep on his skull and turned the hot blood in his veins to ice; for its eyes were like a woman's, big and blue and fringed with long, dark lashes, and in their depths he read a ridicule more dreadful than the bitterest hatred, and when it opened its dark lips and bared its gleaming fangs it did not howl or growl or whine, but laughed a scornful, mocking laugh, sweet as the music of a jonglar's bells, but terrible to hear.

Graf Otho had been to the Emperor's court at Warzburg to pay his devoir to his sovereign and take the Lady Margaretta von Orselm to wife. The Lady Margaretta was not highly favored as to looks, being somewhat wider than her height required, and inclined to be thick of wrist and ankle —some said head, as well. Her teeth were large, her mouth was small, her hair was scanty and of an uncertain color. Her age was also far from certain. But her dower was four pack-mules' load of gold and silver coin, her family was an ancient one, and of much influence at court, and her brother was Count Werther von Orselm, one of the foremost knights in all the Empire's ritterdom.

When the graf returned to Pulitzberg with his newly married wife and all the store of gold and silver which she brought him, the first news that he heard was of the werewolf's ravenings, and when they told him that his game preserves were ravaged by the demon he swore deep-throated German oaths and sent out invitations to his friends and neighbors to assist him in

exterminating this stray hound from Satan's kennels.

The junkers came from far and wide in gleeful response to the summons. The sport should prove diverting; a wolf hunt ever tried the mettle of the staunchest men and dogs. Also, Otho's cellars had few equals in the choiceness of their contents, and—there was the fair Margaretta to be seen. Hohenschuh was ever noted for his nice appreciation of a woman, a horse or a hound, and had wooed, but never offered marriage to, some of the fairest ladies of the Rhineland. Had he, as the vulgar proverb put it, "walked through the woods and come out with a crooked stick?"

They made great feast and holiday at the Pulitzberg. Horses were groomed for the chase, weapons honed and polished, leather garments oiled and softened, and the great hounds from Hibernia which were so fierce that none except the kennel master and his aides dared approach them, and then only with a dish of meat for shield, were starved until their bays and howls of savage hunger rent the air like the clamoring of lost souls at hell's gate.

Dinner had been long since served and the guests had gone unsteadily to bed with more than enough wine to make their sleep devoid of dreams, but Otho lingered in the bower of his lady. It was the same room whence Gertruda, Wolfgang's bride, had hurled herself to death and damnation, but it had been transformed. Tapestries from the bride's home decked the walls, Eastern carpets brought by merchants of Venetia from the Holy Land hid the stone tiles of the floor, and lamps with glass shades fancifully wrought in shapes of birds and beasts and monsters of antiquity replaced the rushlights which had lighted it aforetime.

THE Countess sate in her high chair of gilded oak with cushions of soft Spanish leather and smiled with bovine pride and affection upon her husband. Her tiring-women had prepared her for the night and she wore a bedgown of fine linen under a loose coat of tabby silk. Her hair, of which she had no very great amount, was neatly plaited round her head and covered with a cap of linen lawn; her broad bare feet rested on the silky back of a small spaniel which was curled up on the floor before her, and her bright, unintelligent eyes were on the Count who, half dressed, had paused to try the weight of the Damascus iron sword he purposed wearing on the morrow's hunt. One of the lady's far from slender hands was winding the string of her rosary.

"And art thou not afeared to take the trail against this devil's dog, my husband?" she asked timorously. "Will spear or brand prevail against it unless blessed by Holy Church?"

"By Friar Hilderbrandt, perchance?" he answered with a laugh. "Meseems that tonsured glutton would not be too sorrowful if I were bested by the werewolf. 'Fore heaven, he looks at me as he might look at Satan since——"

He checked himself in mid-word. Gossip traveled fast enow; let his lady learn about Gertruda when she must, and from other lips than his.

"Aye, but the man counts not; his office is the thing of import," she persisted. "Let him be the veriest glutton and wine-bibber in the Reichland, if he hath divine authority he hath power to loose or retain sins, to bless or curse——"

"Power? Bah!" the Count cut in. "What power hath a mumbled Latin phrase compared to this keen iron?" He swung the beautifully tempered blade in a long arc, so that it whistled through the lamplit air. "I tell thee, Margaretta, thou art superstitious as a villein's wench."

"Oh, speak not thus disdainfully of holy things!" she implored. "These werewolves be a fearsome breed of demon-

beasts. By night they go all stealthily on silent feet, and when the fires burn low or the lights flicker—*Sancta Maria!*" There was no breath of breeze through the wide-open casements, but as she spoke the shaded lamp wicks suddenly burnt low, as if a man—or woman—had breathed on them, not quite enough to put them out, but gently, as if trying them.

Graf Otho laughed again — a short, sharp, chiding laugh. "Anon thou'lt tell me that the werewolf may be in this very guarded house of mine," he scoffed.

She nodded solemnly. "In sooth. When lights burn low and blue by night, and thou hear'st a gentle tapping as of fingers at the door or window-bars——"

Like a stage sound timed to meet its cue there came a light, persistent scratching at the iron-strapped panels of the oaken door.

The Countess broke off with a scream and Otho's dark face flushed with anger.

"Do not open, husband!" she called in a still, faint voice. "Leave the door-bolts set and join me in a prayer for our deliverance——"

"Pray thou, then, till thy silly marrow-bones are softened by the stone!" he stormed as he strode toward the door. "By Saint Sebastian his arrows, I'll have the chuckle-headed lout hanged from the highest turret of the—*ha?*"

With anger-quickened fingers he had snapped the heavy triple bolts back and jerked the iron ring that served the door in lieu of a knob. As the oaken frame swung back, the lamplight streamed out in the darkened corridor, straight into the shaggy face of a great she-wolf. The hair of her ruff bristled as though blown upon by some blast of hell-heat; her black lips were curled back, showing rows of glinting teeth and fangs as hard and sharp as sabers. Across her muzzle was a smear of red, fresh blood.

The aspect of the beast was terrible enough, but fear merged into mounting horror as Otho looked into her eyes. No beast's eyes, these, but woman's eyes, long, blue and fringed with dark and curling lashes—the empty, luster-lacking eyes of a dead woman who walks up and down the earth by night, a truant from her unblessed grave.

Otho thrust his sword straight at the great gray head that reared higher than his waist. The beast-thing moved a little, moved so slightly that it hardly seemed to move at all, and the blade passed harmlessly beside its shaggy jowl.

Now panic seized him and he rained a perfect storm of sword-strokes at the monster, yet not once did his steel strike home, and the blue, lack-luster eyes held his with a dead, winkless stare as dreadful and unnerving as the accusations of a guilty conscience.

Cursing, flailing blow on ineffectual blow at the great she-wolf, he gave ground. And inch by inch the wolf advanced on him, not menacingly, but with the steady pressure of relentless fate. Now he stood beside the open casement, and through it he could hear the clamor of the water on the rocks two hundred feet and more below. Dimly, but with terrible insistence, he could hear a woman's voice:

"Look in mine eyes . . . see in them thy doom——"

Then the she-wolf sprang.

The "Jesu-Mary!" of his scream was cut short by the snapping of her jaws upon his neck, and out the window hurtled man and beast—if beast it were. Their bodies flew apart—save for the horrid point of contact where her fangs locked in his throat—whirling like the arms of a child's pinwheel through the blackness of the chasm, till they fell upon the jagged rocks beside the shouting water of the torrent.

THEY found the Countess mad with fear next morning, and on the rock-toothed bottom of the ravine they found

Otho's body, battered almost beyond recognition. But there was neither sign nor token of a wolf's carcass. So they set the story of the wolf down to the ravings of the maddened woman, and said her madness came upon her when she saw her husband fall to death. Could a wolf—even with passports signed by Satan—penetrate the cordon of two hundred fully-armed retainers who kept ward at Pulitzberg?

The Lady Margaretta bore a daughter six months later, but foster parents reared the girl, for her reason never came back and she died a gibbering idiot in the Convent of Our Lady of Eternal Pity without knowing that the Emperor, as was his right by law, took guardianship of her child, and possession of her splendid dowry and the castle of Pulitzberg and all the lands appurtenant thereto.

Sister Clarisse of the Angels was on watch in the infirmary on the night the Countess died, and she affirmed with sobs and trembling that as the poor, afflicted creature breathed her last there came a scratching at the window-bars, and when she looked up sore afraid she saw the face of a great shaggy wolf beyond the mullions.

She also swore, and would not be denied, that it had blue eyes, woman's eyes, the eyes of a dead woman who walks up and down the earth by night, a truant from her unblessed grave.

But Sister Clarisse of the Angels was a very old nun. No one in the convent remembered when she came, but there were stories of her youth, how she had greatly loved a young man from across the Alps, and how he, having been denied her hand in marriage, took poison in her presence, and died writhing horribly before her. They said it had unhinged her mind. At any rate she saw things which no other of the sisterhood could see, and much of what she said was taken with a liberal dose of salt. Besides, the Convent of Our Lady of Eternal Pity was a very holy place. How could any demon-wolf, no matter how malignant, dare set its foot within the sacred confines of the convent close?

THE wolf's raids ceased for some time after Otho's death; then they began again, and now it was the flock of Wolfgang the franklin which suffered most.

A dour, silent man was Wolfgang, and cruel. No beggar ever had an alms at his door, no tenant crofter had a day's grace for the payment of his rent. He gave no greeting when he passed a neighbor on the road, and returned none. He mortified the flesh as if he were a Carmelite, tasting neither wine nor beer, and eating flesh but rarely. When the neighbors sought his aid to hunt the wolf-thing down he drove them from his land with bitter words and curses, but when the beast struck at his own flocks he took his grisarme down from the wall, strapped his long sword on his thigh, and set forth to track the monster by himself.

The fields were silver-plated in the flood of argent moonlight, from the little lakes that gathered in the hollows, jewel-bright flashes scintillated; the sky was filled to the brim with big, cool, untroubled stars. In the coppices of yew and hemlock purple shadows, shot with pleats of moonlight, seemed to shift and change position as if they were a company of elfmen dancing to the music of the night wind in the boughs.

Wolfgang strode across the fields unmindful of the beauty of the scene. What lure has beauty for a man who has no loved face to which he can compare it? Can a cracked bell peal a joy-pæan, or a broken heart beat high?

Far away, so faint that it was scarcely audible, yet swelling, heightening slowly in a quavering crescendo, came a long-drawn, howling bay—the belling of a questing wolf! He gripped the ash stave

of his spear as if it were a walking-staff and hurried toward the sound.

"Beast or devil, traitor hound or goblin damned, I come to grips with it tonight!" he swore savagely.

Now against the rim of a far hilltop he saw something moving. The moonlight picked it out against the sun-bleached stubble of the mowed field and he recognized the lazy, tireless lope. In sooth, it was a wolf. But what a wolf! Higher than the largest mastiff it stood, almost great as a calf, and from the freedom of its gait he knew that it was young and vigorous, not beset with age like most beasts which were lone hunters and attacked sheep folds instead of deer or cattle.

Almost as he saw it the great beast seemed to descry him, and as if it welcomed an ordeal by battle, changed its course, coming toward him in a swift, unhurried run, leaping hedges and stone walls as easily as if they had been lines of shadow on the moon-besilvered fields. Down the long slope of the hill he watched it charge, and his fingers tightened on his spear shaft. Soon they would be in striking distance of each other. Soon . . .

Abruptly as if it had run into a barrier of steel bars the wolf halted in its course. He saw it straighten its forelegs, dig its hind feet in the turf, as it checked itself in mid-stride. Then he saw, and realized the reason for its sudden, almost panic-stricken halt. Cutting through the meadow, so fringed with rank-grown grass and cress that it was hardly visible a dozen feet away, was a small, swift-running rivulet.

"Herr Gott!" His throat closed with a quick, instinctive fear. Witches, warlocks, sprites and goblins cannot cross a living stream. This wolf, this beast that towered over all beasts of its kind that he had ever seen, balked at the little brooklet's rim. . . .

But the fear that gripped his throat never reached his stomach-pit to paralyze him. As the wolf-thing changed its course and ran toward the old Roman road he wheeled and followed in its trail. Two miles away the post road crossed another . . . witches were confused by crossroads, too. If he could drive the demon to the intersection . . .

Now the goblin-beast seemed fleeing. It stretched its long legs in a longer stride, and though the man ran till his breath came in quick, gasping sobs, his quarry distanced him, and disappeared into the shadows of the woods that lay between the farmland and the high road.

Nathless, he would follow. If so be he met the wolf-thing they would join in battle. Accumulated hatred boiled up in his veins like scum upon the surface in a brewing-kettle. What if death betide? Must not the long, long silence of the grave be pleasant to a man whose heart had died within his breast upon his wedding night?

HE EMERGED from the wood and hurried toward the crossroads. A great oak tree stood at the thwarting of the ways, and round it reached a disk of shadow. Was that the movement of a body by the black bole? It might have been a trick of light and shade fused and confused by the wind in the branches, yet if the witch-wolf had sought covert he might come to weapon-reach of it. He paused a moment, spat upon his hands, then hastened toward the tree with grisarme advanced.

A wisp of cloud, leaden-gray, with frayed-out, tattered edges, swept across the bleached disk of the moon. A strange, eery twilight crept over the landscape, and objects seemed to lose their outlines, blending into one another as if they had been patterns in a colorless kaleidoscope.

Savage as the beast he sought, Wolfgang bared his teeth as he rushed at the dark-

ness. "Have I found thee at last, O thou creature of the night——"

The partizan fell clattering to the roadway flints and he staggered back as from a blow, for in answer to his hail a voice replied: "Aye, thou hast found me. Here am I."

She came slowly from the dimness of the shadows, garbed in her linen wedding robe, a chaplet of cornflowers wound around her bright fair hair, and in her eyes the *liebeslicht*—the lovelight—shone as if reflected from the far bright stars that light the gates of Paradise.

"Gertruda—*liebchen!*"

"Husband!"

He shook his head and shut his eyes and passed his hand across them. This was a troll-inspired vision. Gertruda moldered in her grave, her unmarked, solitary grave . . . the spirits of the blessed come not to earth again . . . *ha,* but was she blessed? She who threw herself to death unshriven . . .

Through the confusion of his thoughts he heard her soft words, "——thou wouldst not come to me, and come to thee in this form I could not. Here I am vulnerable to thy steel; wilt thou choose to kill me now, or wilt thou bide with me and become even as I——"

"Be thou spirit damned or soul that bends from Paradise to knit the fragments of my broken heart, thou art my one and only love, my flesh, my blood, my life, and I will be as thou art!" he answered hoarsely as he took her in his arms.

A wild, fierce light of elation blazed suddenly in her blue eyes. "Together!" she exclaimed as her lips sought his with avid hunger. "Come, lie with me in my dark-sodded bed by day, and sleep through sunshine and through rain until the moon assumes dominion of the sky; then—ah, then we'll range the hills and fields together——"

"Though the pathway lead to lowest Niffleheim—together!" he responded, and pressed his lips against her red mouth.

"Together, yea," a third voice spoke, "but not in sin or defiance of heaven!"

A dreadful pain pierced Wolfgang's back beneath the shoulder blade; he felt the pang of it drive through his heart, his breast . . . "Gertruda—beloved!" he gasped, then choked and died.

"Ah, it is done—thanks, kindly Father —Wolfgang, husband—lover!" Blood stopped her words as the sharp sword point drove into her heart.

FRIAR HILDERBRANDT had been praying by Gertruda's grave. Tales of the werewolf ravaging the countryside had come to him, but he had less fear of the goblin brute than he had of the Devil; which was none at all. For despite his gluttony and fondness for the tankard, Friar Hilderbrandt was a man of faith, believing with implicit confidence in the goodness of his God, and regarding Him much as a child regards his father. God was his shield and buckler in assaults by the enemy, his ever-present help in time of trouble, and would not forsake him if he came in conflict with a demon member of that demon host not yet made fast in hell. So Friar Hilderbrandt walked serenely—albeit with somewhat of a waddle—alone through wood and field and darksome, stone-locked mountain pass, and never was molested by man or beast or devil.

All through the night he had been watching at the bed of one who passed from transient life to life eternal, and the silver pallor that betokens coming dawn was spreading in the east ere he reached Gertruda's sepulcher. Now, as he finished his orisons and with some effort got up from his knees, far away, but drawing nearer by the second, came the hunting-call of a lone wolf.

"Laus Deo!" said Friar Hilderbrandt, and crossed himself. Then he set off down

the road toward the village. He did not hurry, nor did he glance back. He had commended himself to divine protection. The affair was Heaven's, not his.

But the howling grew nearer. Across the field he saw the wolf come charging, and stopped in his tracks. He could not outrun a puppy, much less a full-grown wolf. Let whatever was to come betide him here and save him the exertion of a useless flight.

Nor had he long to wait. Moving swiftly as the shadows of a scudding cloud he saw the monstrous beast approaching, leaping lightly over hedgerow and stone fence, eating up the distance with a long-limbed, tireless lope. Now he saw the gleam of its great eyes, the flashing of its monstrous fangs, the lolling of its pink tongue dripping slaver. He heard its panting, quick-drawn breath, and steadied himself for its attack, for it was less than fifty feet away, and traveling faster than a wind-blown leaf.

But it passed him as if he had not been there, and rushed straight for the shelter of the oak tree. The beast was straining against time, as if it ran a race with the fast-spreading brightness in the east.

Friar Hilderbrandt was schooled in demonology. Imps, werewolves, ghosts and goblins, all things of evil and the darkness were bounden by the shades of night, he knew. The werewolf hastened to its lair or place of metamorphosis before the cock crowed greeting to the rising day-star, else it must remain in lupine form until the next sunrise. He knew the werewolf's habit. By day it was not recognizable, forasmuch as it might be a man of favored looks, or a fair and smiling woman, who with the onset of the night became a foul, misshapen beast with blood-bedabbled jaws. . . . Who in the nighborhood would this night-prowler be? Mayhap some member of his very congregation. . . .

The racing wolf had reached the shadow of the oak tree, paused a moment, sunk down on the verdure. Now it seemed to writhe and twist in a death-agony; now it rose upon its knees, stood upright—*"Conjuro te, abire ad tuum locum, in nomine—"* Friar Hilderbrandt stopped the words of exorcism half intoned, for he recognized the slight, straight form in the blue linen gown.

"Gertruda—*thou?"* he exclaimed as he saw the long,unplaited hair, the pale sweet face and glowing blue eyes of the girl for whose redemption he prayed nightly.

"I," she answered with a little wanton laugh. "Even I, good Father. Behold the thing I am become. Outcast from Heaven, yet not meriting eternal punishment, I am doomed to roam the earth by night, a thing undead, yet not alive until release comes through——"

THE shrilling of a cock's crow split the morning silence, and her words ceased as a candle's flicker ceases when the snuffers close on it. Where the lissome blue-gowned form had stood there were only the blue shadows of the early morning; where the deep-toned voice had spoken there was only the sigh of the dawning-wind among the branches.

Twice more Friar Hilderbrandt had seen the werewolf racing for the shelter of the crossroads grave, but always the cock's crow had come ere he could question further. "I am doomed to roam the earth by night until release comes," she had said. *Ergo,* release was possible. But how? Would ashen stake and sexton's spade suffice? These were potent weapons against vampires, but Gertruda was no vampire. She had sucked no blood from living man, threatened none with the infection of her earthbound state. True, she had battened on the flocks when she assumed wolfshead, but sheep were bred for slaughter.

Graf Otho—was it she who mauled the

porter at the castle gate, then forced herself into the Countess' bower to hurl him to his death in the ravine where she had died herself? It took no schoolman's casuistry to construe that killing—if she did it—as an execution rather than a murder. She had spared the forester in the Schwarzwald—time enough to resort to the stake and spade when she showed signs of menacing men's souls and bodies.

Tonight he had come early to the grave. He would accost her, force her to reveal the means of her deliverance. . . . The moon sailed high across the cloud-surf of the sky, the night was coolly pleasant, and he was very tired. He had dined with noble amplitude, and washed his dinner down with many a frothing tankard of the strong brown home-brewed ale. The grass grew lush and soft; here was a little hillock thick-beset with buttercups for pillow. . . .

The sound of voices startled him. Wolfgang's voice—and Gertruda's. Hers: "I am vulnerable to thy steel here . . . wilt thou come to me and become as I am?" His: "I will be as thou art!"

Softly Friar Hilderbrandt rose from his grassy couch. More quietly than pussy steals on an unwary mouse he stepped across the turf and paused behind the two who clung and kissed and, mouth to mouth, swore their two destinies should be as one, whether bliss or torment everlasting.

He snatched Wolfgang's long sword from its scabbard, drew the gleaming blade back and with the full weight of his great bulk drove the keen steel home. "In God his name, my children. Better that the body perish than the soul!"

They fell together, still locked in each other's arms, and after he had said the prayers ordained for those who die, the old man bent and kissed them both upon the brow.

Weeping, but with exultation in his heart, he left them, trudging down the dusty road that led to the village and the little hut that served him for a rectory.

Gertruda now was truly dead, no more an earthbound thing of menace. She had thanked him ere she breathed her last. Wolfgang had escaped her fate. They were with each other; they were safe. How beautiful they looked as they lay on the cool, green turf . . . wedded. Aye, wedded twice, once with a golden ring, once with a sword's sharp steel.

"*Absolvo te,* Gertruda; *te absolvo,* Wolfgang," he repeated between sobs.

THE Emperor's masked justicer did the sentence of the law upon him, for he confessed the murder freely. Indeed, he had confessed a double murder, but when they went to the crossroads they found only Wolfgang, with the wound of a great sword agape in back and breast. Of the body of Gertruda there was neither sign nor trace, and when they dug into her grave they found nothing but a few bones and some shreds of rotting linen.

When they brought him out to die he smiled upon the headsman and his varlets and put the heading cup of strong, sweet Moselle wine up to his mouth as if it were a tankard to be drained in joy, and smacked his lips with hearty relish as he tossed it away empty. Then he laid his neck upon the block and murmured: "Wolfgang, Gertruda, my dear children, comes now one who loved you very dearly. I am an old man and a weary. Stretch forth thy hands, lend me of thy strength and youth to pass this darksome valley."

There were those who wept to see his head fall at the ax-stroke, for he had ever been a kindly man, and a godly one, according to his lights; but certainly no saint.

The Withered Heart

By G. G. PENDARVES

A strange story about the evil heart of Count Dul, which continued to pulsate for two hundred years after its owner's death—a tale of the dire catastrophe that took place when the Count's half-forgotten grave was opened

DEAR JOHN,

If a fifteen years' friendship means anything to you, come at once. Sorry to hustle you like this, good old slow-worm that you are, but we've simply got to go into session about this thing before the month's out. The Ides of March are on Tuesday next, May 31st, this year.

My whole future is at stake and you've got to come and help. It's a very very queer thing, and Jonquil and I don't agree at all about it. I wish to heaven we'd found the box earlier and had more time to argue it all out. I see Jonquil's point of view, of course, and feel in a way bound to carry on for her sake, but—well, you know my views about playing round with anything like magic and necromancy. Jonquil says I'm morbid, still— Oh, well! come and see us through it.

RAFE.

May 27th, 1938.

I TRIED to pretend to myself that I couldn't go, that I wouldn't go! But even as I made these protestations inwardly, I was giving instructions to the boy, Joe, who daily and conscientiously thwarts my best efforts to grow flowers, fruit and vegetables. For a quarter of an hour or so my foredoomed struggle went on.

"——and Joe! that gallon of weed-killer is for the whole lawn, don't pour it over one dandelion root.

"It's merely one of his latest ideas, he gets them like measles. I won't be fooled into rushing off and leaving my garden just now.

"Joe! if you let that dog bury his bones in the new seedling-bed, I'll kill you when I get back and bury you with them.

"All rubbish about his future! Another few weeks would make all the difference here! Why next Tuesday?

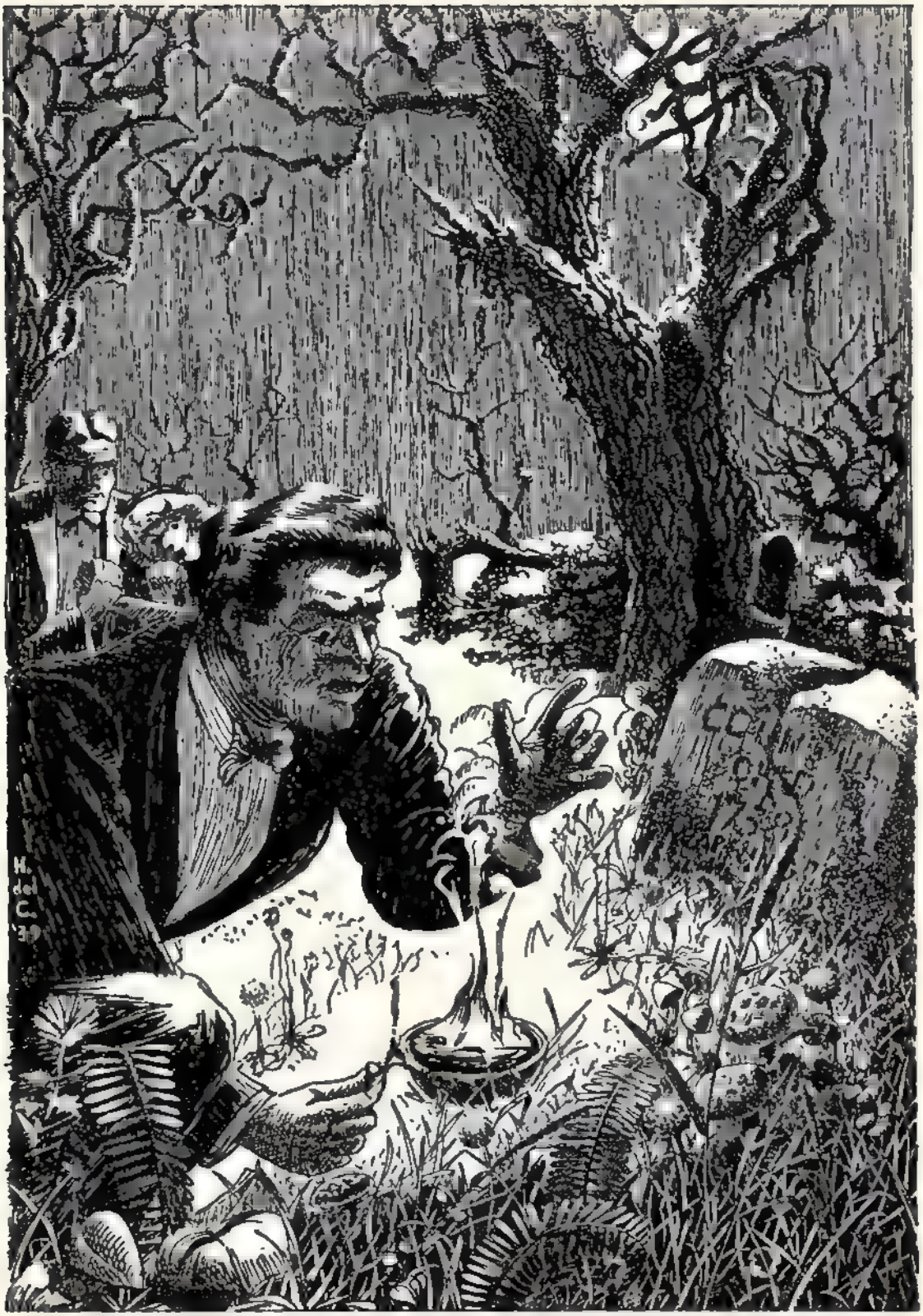
"Don't forget the quassia for the gooseberries, Joe!

"——and what the devil has magic to do with his future? No! I won't go! I won't waste——"

By this time I was in the potting-shed, kicking off my heavy shoes and scrambling hastily into another and cleaner pair. Like iron to a magnet, I was drawn to the house where my mind continued to carry on acrimonious debates while my body intelligently took no notice of my mental disturbance and obeyed my will.

I packed a bag, interviewed my old housekeeper who expressed her disapproval of my plans by serving up watery coffee and an India-rubber omelette for my lunch, and set off within the hour with parting instructions to expect me back in God's good time.

It would have been more fitting to have said in the devil's own time. So far, however, no tinge of the saturnine malice which had, after a lapse of two centuries,



"Here is light for your sightless eyes."

begun to manifest itself, darkened the joyful anticipation of seeing my friend, Rafe Dewle.

I clambered into my old Austin-twelve and set her battered bonnet northwards. Those last hours on the open road when life was still free and untainted! Never, never again shall I experience anything like them. Knowledge has crippled imagination since then—evil polluted every spring of happiness.

On Shap Fells I stopped to cool my engine. Around me, yellow gorse breathed out its honey perfume; bumble-bees fussed to and fro as I lay stretched out on the heath and watched white cloud-feathers drift in the blue above. I slept for a brief spell on the warm breathing earth with the thin lonely call of curlews in my ears and the sense of hoary guardian hills all about me.

In sleep, the first faint brush of evil touched me. I dreamed that I journeyed on—on into a dark valley where, amidst mist and darkness and confusion, I felt the approach of invisible and threatening hosts. Yet I must go on swiftly—swiftly! Someone was waiting. Someone was in danger. I must hurry, hurry, hurry!

I woke to find my sunlit hemisphere all dark and angry. The great hills reared up threateningly into thunderous cloud-banks. Gusts of wind scattered the golden gorse-bloom and whistled the coming storm along over shivering grass and heather.

With a sense of urgent fear left by my dream I started my car and dropped by long winding loops of road down to the valley, and, as I tore along leafy green lanes toward Keswick this fear persisted. Once past the town, I drove even more quickly, cutting across the head of Borrowdale under dark Helvellyn's shadow and along the unfrequented road which led to *Braunfel*.

The rambling old manor house lay some twelve miles from town. I'd known it well when Rafe and I were boys together. His people had been wealthy landowners before 1914. The war took their men. The lean following years took their money and lands. *Braunfel* was on its last legs, financially, and I wondered why Rafe hadn't sold up before his marriage. I couldn't reconcile what little I knew of Jonquil French with the austere bare life that Rafe's inheritance offered. Their meeting and the marriage that so swiftly followed had been romantic and impassioned, a sort of Lochinvar affair; for Rafe had snatched her from another and very wealthy suitor almost at the church doors.

So characteristic of him and that hot Magyar blood of his! Even the lovely spoiled Jonquil French had succumbed to it. But for how long?

His letter indicated the thin end of a wedge to my mind. I'd met his bride in London and had not particularly liked her—not the wife for Rafe at all. I'd no idea what was the mysterious "thing" the pair disagreed about, of course, and I wished he'd been more explicit. Planning a good sensational story for me, no doubt. He loved being melodramatic.

At last I could see the bulk of *Braunfel* ahead, gray in shafts of pale clear light piercing a curtain of rain. About it, wide untended meadows stretched. Behind, the bare face of the fell, where only stumps remained of the great fir forest that had been so beautiful a background to the ancient house. War victims, those sheltering lovely trees! And no plantations showed their young green promise for the future. How gaunt *Braunfel* appeared! Not only that—it was positively sinister. I tried in vain to put the thought away. There was a look of boding grimness hanging over the massive pile that even neglected lands and bare scarred hillside could not wholly explain.

My old car splashed along the last mile

of muddy lane between high ragged hedges. The road turned and twisted like a sea-serpent. Preoccupied and depressed, I took a sharp angle and put on my brakes with a curse. A tall and very agile figure seemed to leap from right under the Austin's bonnet.

"Rafe! What the deuce——"

"Hello! Hello! you old mud-turtle! I forgive you—don't apologize!"

He opened the car-door, slid his long legs under the dashboard, put an arm about my shoulders and grinned in the old familiar way.

"You're a marvel, John. I didn't really count on your coming until tomorrow, but I got so restless thinking you might turn up that I've been hanging round for the last hour here. Never been so glad to see your solemn old mug in my life!"

My heart grew light at sight and sound of him. Marriage had not altered him as far as his friendship and affection were concerned; they were mine still, perfectly unchanged, the warmest, strongest tie I had in the world.

I grunted and glowered up at his face, dark as a gipsy's, lighted up with the inner fire that burned so strongly in him. I never knew man, woman, or child with so glowing, so intense a quality.

"Same old mad March hare!" I grumbled. "I'd hoped marriage might have given you a grain or two of sense. I suppose you realize you've practically ruined my garden for the next six months by dragging me up here?"

"Splendid! I have made a hero of you!"

He burst out into a wild barbaric song and yelled and yodeled until I drowned him with my car's horn. The noise was insane. We broke down and laughed like hyenas at last and I drove on feeling younger than I'd ever expected to feel again—my twenty-eight years had weighed heavily since Rafe's marriage.

SATURDAY, *May 28th.* Once under the steep gabled roofs of *Braunfel,* my bubble of delight was pricked. The sight of Jonquil French—Jonquil Dewle I should say—brought back the formless fear of my queer dream on Shap Fell. Why the sight of a girl like a princess in a fairy-tale should depress a man, I didn't know. Jealousy? No, neither of Rafe nor of his exquisite bride.

I had been jealous, afraid she'd come between us: I knew now most emphatically that she had not. Nor did I envy him. A woman has never yet roused the passionate thrill of joy I feel at sight of a perfect flower. It's no use arguing with me, I can't help it; that's the way I'm made.

"Mr. Fowler—John, I mean! How *perfect* that you've come! What a relief! You simply can't imagine what a time I've had lately. How lovely and large and shy you look! Isn't he *too* perfect, Rafe?"

"Certainly not. I refuse to live with two perfect beings. John's a mere man like myself."

She blew him a kiss, pirouetted round the dark paneled room like a little red flame blown on the wind, dropped on one knee before me and raised her hands in an attitude of prayer.

"Dear, dear John! You *are* perfect! Oh, if you could only see yourself. Just like a lovely solemn pine tree planted in the middle of our library. Please, please may I kiss you—I really must."

In a flash she was on her light dancing feet, her arms about me, her pleading face upraised. I bent a stiff reluctant head, received a moth-like touch on my lips and watched her and Rafe clasp each other in ecstatic amusement.

"I take it back, darling." Rafe wiped his eyes. "He certainly is—perfect."

"Well, now you've settled that, perhaps you'll start explaining things. You haven't brought me here to point out the singular beauty of my character?"

"No," chuckled Jonquil. "But you wouldn't be of any use to us unless you were such a perfect wise old owl."

Her smile glanced like sun on running water.

"Not time to explain before dinner. It's a long, sad tale. Rafe will take you up to your nice large drafty room, and when you hear a sound like a bull being massacred—come down for dinner. Rafe's invented a patent bugle-thing he uses when I'm late for meals; he's too lazy to walk the half-mile upstairs."

LEFT to myself in a bedroom whose size and dignity made me feel something like a small dry ham-sandwich on a platter designed for the traditional boar's head, I pushed open a diamond-paned lattice window, slumped down on the broad uncushioned seat beneath it and glared out at the cobbled garth below. Pigeons kept up a low bubbling complaint from roofs of stables and outbuildings—ruinous affairs, minus doors and windows, their slates and stones stained with centuries of rain, their woodwork gray and cracked, weeds, moss and lichen a green-gold signal of defeat.

It wasn't the garth, or the many evidences of poverty elsewhere that worried me, however, as I sat listening to the *broo! broo broo* of the pigeons. It was the thought of Jonquil.

It was impossible to do more than put into mere words her remarkable beauty, and what are words when it comes to a young, living, exquisitely made creature like her? She had crisp red-gold curls, eyes of changing deep warm brown that reminded me of wallflowers in sunlight, a milk-white skin, and body so light and quick in movement, so sure in poise, so extraordinarily expressive of her every mood that she seemed winged—a brilliant tropic bird darting and flashing to and fro.

But it was the will behind her laughing eyes that frightened me. Her will—blind, ignorant, unyielding, a terrible weapon in her reckless hands!

Abruptly, my dream possessed me again. . . . I was hurrying along that dark valley into mists and darkness and confusion—someone needed my help—I must hurry, hurry, hurry. And now Jonquil was beside me, her hand on my arm, her voice laughing, persuading, telling me to come back, come back, come back—she hindered me—I could not shake off her detaining hand. Her clear laugh prevented my hearing what my ears were straining for. I only knew I must hurry, hurry, hurry—in the gathering darkness ahead someone needed me. . . .

It wasn't until after leaving the dinner-table, graced no longer by Queen Anne silver and Waterford glass, that I realized the significance of Jonquil's inclusion in my disturbing and recurring dream.

Rain and wind turned the May night to chill discomfort. Rafe lighted the big library fire, piled up fir-cones and logs until a heartening blaze warmed a respectable area of the lofty room with its moldering books, threadbare rugs and worm-eaten oak.

Stimulated by tobacco, whisky, and Rafe's company I began to discount my boding fears again—but not for long. Jonquil was eager as Rafe seemed reluctant to enlighten me. He yielded to her importunity at last, lifted down an iron casket from a high bookshelf and set it on a heavy table near the fire.

"There you are, lady and gentleman!" he made an exaggerated showman's gesture. "This is the Luck of *Braunfel* and guaranteed to supply your heart's desire. To make its magic work you need a nice round full moon, a strong belief in ghosts and devils, and a bottle of my best whisky inside you. These will qualify you to commune with a Benevolent Gent who died two hundred years ago in the hope of an extraordinary Resurrection from the Dead."

His nonsense wasn't well received. The sight of that twelve-by-eight inch box filled me with a nasty crawling sensation of horror. I set down my glass and stared at it in silence.

Jonquil ran up to the table, tried to pull the box from beneath Rafe's long brown fingers.

"It's not fair—it's not fair to tell him like that! You're trying to prejudice him. Let *me* show him! Let *me* tell him!"

Instantly he became the bland infuriating nurse with a spoiled child, patted her shining coppery curls with one hand and imprisoned her impatient fingers with his other.

"Now! Now! Now! Remember there's a little visitor here, darling! Don't forget your pretty manners!"

He kissed and put her back in a chair with another admonitory pat on the head.

"This is my Ancestor! My Benevolent Gent—hereafter known as B.G., and I will not be intimidated by a woman with red hair!"

I knew Rafe well. He was stalling now. It was a very old habit of his to approach anything he deeply disliked with idiotic badinage. Well, he might deceive Jonquil, but not me. So I sat tight and waited. My hands and feet grew cold in spite of the hot cheerful fire. I was most acutely awake, my eyes on Rafe's face, when that cursed dream of mine recurred . . . a dark long valley stretched between us . . . he faded, dissolved into distance and smoky dark confusion. . . .

"John! What is it?"

I FOUND myself on my feet, blinking stupidly down into Jonquil's alarmed face. Rafe was staring at me across the table, his mouth open in surprise.

"Cramp?" he inquired. "Must have been a bad twinge. I never heard you yell like that before."

"Cramp!" I echoed feebly, then pulled myself together. "No—it's a tooth—going to have it out."

I mumbled apologies, filled my glass, drank and felt considerably better. My mind cleared.

"Let's get down to business." I waved my pipe toward the box on the table. "I want to know where *I* come in. Let's have the story straight, mind!"

"John, you *are* such a darling! When you look at me like that through those enormous specs I feel just like a criminal before a judge."

Jonquil sat very stiffly and raised a hand as if to take an oath:

"I promise not to interrupt—unless I *have* to."

She tucked her little green slippers under her, curled up in the corner of a settee, and assumed an air of child-like innocent patience. I watched her with a pang. She was so sure of herself. She knew so exactly what she wanted—and intended to get it at all costs.

"Well?" my voice was brusk with anxiety as I turned to Rafe. "Bring out the skeleton in the cupboard."

His lips twisted in a rather doubtful smile.

"Queer you should say that. It's not exactly a skeleton, but it is part of a dead body."

"What? Your Ancestor, did you say—was he embalmed?"

"His heart was."

He lifted the casket's heavy lid as he spoke. A breath of thin cold air blew across my face and neck as I leaned forward to watch. I hated to see him standing over that beastly box; there was something so repulsive and ominous about it that my flesh crept when his fingers touched its rusty lid. Intuition told me that he did more than open a lid—he opened a door to something deadlier than plague.

It was a relief to my taut nerves to see him take out two tangible objects

and set them on the table. One was a fat little book, fastened with broad brass clasps and bound in solid leather. The other—I got to my feet and went to examine it more closely.

My gorge rose at sight of the dark dried thing. I've seen mummies, and some were hideous enough. I've prowled about laboratories and examined scientific specimens preserved in fluids, and many were fairly revolting to a mind and imagination like mine. But this little horror, black and withered, with a strange metallic sheen! In amazement I drew still closer, unable to credit my sight. Then I straightened up with a jerk and glanced at Rafe.

"It's living! It beats—the thing beats!"

He nodded—"Since 1738, according to his tombstone date."

I saw he shared my revulsion. I forced myself to touch the heart, and drew back in horror at finding the dark withered bit of muscle was warm.

Jonquil clapped her hands. "You see! You see! Now perhaps you'll persuade Rafe to do it. Oh, he must—he must!"

She could contain herself no longer and flashed across to us. There wasn't a vestige of fear in her eager face as she put out a delicate exploring hand and touched the withered heart. Her faith in it, her strong will to test it, lent the dreadful thing power, and I saw it swell under her fingers—saw the throbbing pulse beat stronger, fuller.

"No! Don't!"

Rafe's voice sharply admonished her. His hand snatched back her own. She looked from him to me and laughed, but the red-brown eyes were bright with impatient anger.

"How exasperating men are! You look like two old hens with a duckling! I didn't think you'd be afraid to, John."

She gave me a stormy scornful glance. Next moment she was curled up in her corner again, sudden as a puff of wind.

"John, darling!" her voice was honey-sweet now; "that's a heart of gold. Quite literally a heart of gold for Rafe and me—if he chooses! Oh, I see what you're thinking. You're a sentimentalist like Rafe. I'm not. *His* heart won't reduce the Bank's overdraft, you know. *That*"—she flicked an airy hand toward the table—"that heart will."

I caught Rafe's glance at her and sharply realized his carefully concealed unhappiness. His shining tower of romance was fast changing to an old house in need of repair. The solitary countryside where he and she would walk in dreams was being reduced to an estate whose every hedge and gate and meadow clamored for money—money—money! I'd never felt the pinch of my own straitened circumstances before, but now I hated myself—I'd have given anything to put things right for Rafe. And I hated Jonquil too—unreasonably, fiercely, for making him unhappy.

I didn't answer her. I was watching Rafe as, with swift distasteful touch, he took up the repulsive little heart, restored it to its metal box and dropped the lid with a clang.

Then he picked up the squat leather book and I followed him to the fireside.

I was convinced he was as much relieved as I to have that beastly heart out of sight.

"Don't tremble in your shoes, old man! I'm not going to read this tome right through. It's full of queer stories and experiments that don't concern our problem directly. This is the really juicy bit that does."

He drew a stiff yellowed crackling sheet from a pocket of the book's cover and unfolded it with a flourish.

"This is the apple of discord in the house of Dewle! This is the bee in Jonquil's bonnet! This is what's muting the family lute! *A scrap of paper*—a thing capable of starting anything in the world

—wars, duels, murders—all the trouble that is, or ever will be."

"A check for £1,000,000 is a scrap of paper I'd love to see—with your name on it, dearest!"

"It was only £100,000 this morning," he reminded her. "Even a B. G. has limits, you must remember."

"And those that don't ask, don't get," she retorted with a flirt of her red curls.

"Well, we'll see what John thinks of my ancestor, Count Dul's *billet-doux.*" He gave me a swift glance. "There's a preliminary but I'll spare you about his grave. It's been lost for generations, but Jonquil discovered it after reading this."

I could see the black thick lettering through the semi-transparent paper as Rafe held it up. He seemed to know it pretty well by heart, to judge by the way he galloped through the closely written lines:

This document concerns only those in whose veins my blood doth run, and who bear the ancient name of Dul. Let any such read these words with faith to believe and courage to obey, and to them will I grant the wish that lies most closely to their heart, be it for life beyond mortal span, for riches, for fame, or for the sweet delights of love. Let him who would seek my aid ask in the full knowledge that I, Count Dul, have power to give him his desire.

For his part, he must most strictly observe such instructions as are writ hereafter, failing not in any particular. Let him take careful heed therefore to obey.

THE DEED MUST BE DONE UPON A CERTAIN NIGHT and that the first night of a month of June when the moon is at the full between its second and third quarters.

I MUST BE SUMMONED BY ONE WHO STANDS BESIDE MY GRAVE and in such words as are graven upon the inner side of the Box in which this document shall be discovered, together with the Book and my Heart.

AT THE FIRST LINE OF THE CONJURATION MY KINSMAN SHALL LIGHT A FLAME and it shall be of oil poured out in a black bowl and set at the foot of the grave.

AT THE SECOND LINE HE SHALL SPRINKLE EARTH UPON THE GRAVE and it shall be earth which fire has made bitter, and rain has washed, and the four winds blown upon.

AT THE THIRD LINE HE SHALL SET MY HEART AT THE HEAD OF THE GRAVE; then, kneeling beside it, he shall cut his left hand until his blood drops from it upon the heart.

LASTLY HE SHALL SUMMON ME IN A LOUD VOICE AND PRONOUNCE HIS WISH. And I shall hear him. And I will come to him. And whatsoever boon he asks, it shall be his.

RAFE stopped reading as abruptly as he'd begun, and held out the paper.

"You can read the Conjuration yourself. It's a bit melodramatic to declaim aloud just now."

I read in silence, then sat staring into the fire. The touch of the paper, its crabbed evil lettering and the hateful words themselves filled me with loathing.

"Well?" Rafe continued. "How's that for an ancestor? Jonquil's convinced that if I do my little song and dance he'll come rushing back from—well, this Book leaves no doubt from *where*—with a Present for a Good Boy under his ghostly arm."

"Yes, I'm convinced he would."

"Oh, John! You dear! You absolute darling!" cried Jonquil. "You *do* think there's something in it? You really and truly do! Oh, I'm thrilled. Rafe's been so exasperating about it. Now he'll simply *have* to give in."

"I didn't say that I agreed with you," I interrupted.

She sat up with a jerk, scattering cigarette ash over the satin iridescence of her dress. Black cold rage possessed me, brain and body. I knew I'd never make her understand—spoiled lovely little materialist that she was. Superstition urged her to snatch at this promised wealth. Ignorance blinded her to the hideous risk.

"You don't agree with me? You've just said you believed the Count could and would return!"

"Yes. I believe that."

"Well?" Her face grew radiant again. "Then you're just teasing! You *are* on my side, after all."

"No. Once and for all, I'm utterly against you. The man that wrote that promise and left behind him that foul thing"—I pointed to the box on the table—"must have been the devil's own brother."

"Oh-h-h!" wailed Jonquil. "You're not going to talk about demons and dangers and unholy powers, too! Rafe's been croaking like a raven for three whole days—and now you!"

"Go to it, old man!" urged Rafe. "She won't take it from me, but perhaps you can make her see it's not just money for jam."

I knew I couldn't move her, but I tried—explained, reasoned, argued, all to no purpose.

"It's no use trying to frighten me. You believe Count Dul can be brought back," she repeated for the twentieth time, "and that he could make Rafe a rich man. That's enough for me. He's only a ghost, poor thing! Perhaps he was just a harmless eccentric old man. Wouldn't make a will. Wanted to give it himself to his descendants."

"Harmless! What about that heart of his—beating two hundred years after his death? D'you think unaided human knowledge could leave *that* behind? Count Dul will surely return if the door is opened to him. But it's forbidden. The dead may not—*must* not return."

"I can't see why not. You don't actually know any more than I do myself. You've read a lot of stuffy books and believe everything in them. I haven't. I'm unprejudiced. I'm willing to take risks."

"You mean to let Rafe take them."

Rafe, who'd sat listening with a queer twisted smile, laughed out at this.

"Hear! Hear! Exactly. Is *she* to do a pantomime scene at midnight by the grave of a disreputable old nobleman? No! Is *she* to chat with a two-hundred year old devil-worshipper in the moonlight? No! Is *she* asked to shed her good red blood on a thing that looks like a bit of cat's meat? No!"

"Well, Rafe, darling! It probably *is* all nonsense and I'm tired of arguing about it. Still——"

She jumped up from the settee and stood before the fire, facing the two of us.

"John has helped me, after all." She dropped me a mocking curtsy. "Yes, you dear old Solomon! You've helped enormously. Now I feel absolutely certain there *is* something in it, or you wouldn't be so worried.

"You know, darling," she turned to Rafe, "you promised to be guided by John's opinion. He's given it. He completely believes in your ancestor. And so do I—now! I'll never forgive you if you don't take a chance and try this thing out."

"Jonquil!" I was on my feet now, almost incoherent with fury. "What I believe in is the risk—the damnable risk of trying such a thing. You only believe in the money you want and shut your eyes to anything else. D'you suppose for a moment that dead Thing has waited two centuries to give you a fortune?"

She burst out laughing. "John, if you could only see yourself! You look like one of the Minor Prophets in action! There's

a picture in the National Gallery that exactly——"

"Rafe!" I was almost shouting now. "*You* know enough, if she doesn't, to realize the wicked insanity of doing such a thing. D'you remember Harland and the sticky end he came to? And Browning who's gibbering away in an asylum? They happen to be men we know personally, but think of the hundreds of others who've been fools enough to think necromancy's a mere parlor game — who've deliberately walked into hell! It's hushed up—such cases always are. People are called mad, or reputed dead of heart attacks, etc. The truth is too beastly to publish."

"There's a good deal in what you say." Rafe had assumed a poise of amused detachment now. "I've not delved into occult lore as you have, old man. I dislike what I know, however. Still, Jonquil's attitude of 'nothing venture, nothing win' has a lot to recommend it."

She flew to him, took his hand in both her own.

"Oh! I knew, I *knew* you'd be an angel! You really mean to try it out?"

His answering look at her eager lovely face, his gesture as he rumpled her flaming aureole of hair, was sufficient for me. She'd won. My hot angry opposition had decided him, had pushed him into doing so. And I cursed myself for a pompous muddle-headed fool. I'd tilted the balance down—down to hell. If I'd kept calm and laughed at Count Dul, made light of the whole affair, Jonquil's belief might have faded. I'd lost my temper with her—lost my best chance by forcing Rafe to take her part. . . .

My dream enveloped me in its swirling vapor. . . . I was driving furiously down that long desolate valley—in the cloudy smothering darkness I heard a voice—*Count Dul! Count Dul! Count Dul!* The piercing cry was echoed by howls of laughter from the swirling mists—I drove on—on — someone needed me — someone I loved, needed me. . . .

SUNDAY, MAY 29th. I spent a night of wretched anger and self-reproach and misery, interspersed with lapses into the haunting terror of my dream.

Rafe found me at eight a.m., empty pipe between my teeth, sitting on the stone parapet of a bridge, my thoughts dark and cold as the water I watched so gloomily.

"Not worth the usual penny, I can see!"

Rafe came to perch beside me.

"Still, there's some excuse for you. Enough to make anyone broody—my estate! Reminds me of the hymn, 'Change and decay in all around I see'."

He patted me on the back.

"Cheer up, Jacko! And don't worry about the way things have turned out. This way—or another! What odds? I'm tremendously bucked up to have you here, and I'm bent on enjoying myself while I can. Forget Tuesday night—forget it! After all, you never know."

His look, his voice, his friendly touch cheered me. After all, as he said, one never *did* know! It was a relief to let myself be bluffed by his absurdly high spirits. Depression slipped off like a wet cloak as we tramped home for breakfast as carefree as if the pair of us had nothing more on our minds than a boat-race, or a thesis to be finished.

Jonquil appeared in high feather at the breakfast table—adorable with Rafe, mockingly sweet with me. And, of course, she scarcely talked of anything but Count Dul —how and when and where and what was going to happen about the wealth with which the family fortune was to be restored.

Rafe refused to be serious for even a moment about the B.G., as he called the Count. He was in the unreasoning fey mood that always seized him before any special test in our college days.

"I think the date's a mistake," he remarked. "The old boy meant April 1st."

I didn't remind him that the last night of May, this year, was peculiarly fitted for Count Dul's return. He knew considerably more than he acknowledged of ceremonial magic. It was unlikely that the significance of next Tuesday's date had escaped him. Together, as students, we'd read the Fourth Book of *Philosophia Occulta*, and the works of Pirus de Mirandola, and the *Grimoire* of Pope Honorius.

Above all, he'd read the book which Count Dul had left behind him. I'd borrowed and read it too, from cover to cover, and it was plain that Rafe's ancestor had, after many experimental essays, followed the teachings and practises of the infamous Lord of Corasse. These entailed observance of astronomy and, according to them, such a purpose as the return of the dead could only be accomplished at certain rare conjunctions of the stars and moon and planets. Rafe must be aware of these facts.

"Perhaps," Jonquil's face sparkled with excitement, "perhaps it will be priceless old jewelry he brought from Hungary. Count Dul was the first of your family to settle in England, wasn't he, Rafe?"

"He came because he was pushed," he replied. "They found he'd smuggled emeralds mined in the High Tatra Alps. He escaped from a particularly spectacular death connected with rope and four horses by a miracle—and, tradition records, by the aid of the devils he served."

"Emeralds!" breathed Jonquil, her eyes two deep pools of ecstasy. "How I adore emeralds! I shall keep the very most beautiful for myself, Rafe. You can sell the rest if I have just one perfect stone to wear."

"Certainly, Madam!"

He whipped out a notebook and pencil and assumed a business-like air.

"Let me see, now! What size and color does Madam prefer? I would not like to order something unsuitable. Oval, round, or square? Green or rose-red?"

"Rose-red," she took him up promptly. "A very very large square-cut stone set as a pendant with diamonds."

He licked his pencil and printed her order laboriously.

"You can take off that superior smirk, my child," he assured her. "There are such things as rose-red emeralds."

Their discussion went on to the end of the meal. Then she announced that we were all going to climb Hawes Fell.

"I've found a black bowl for the oil. All we need now is the earth."

"Earth! Climb up five hundred feet on a good Sabbath day of rest! Your breakfast has flown to your head, child. Think again—what about my untilled acres?"

"Doesn't it say the earth must be bitter with fire, and washed with rain, and blown on by the four winds? Very well, then. Wasn't there a heath-fire on Hawes Fell last month? It's as black as soot now and soaked in rain, and every wind in the world blows up there."

She'd made up her mind. It was to be earth from Hawes Fell, and the remainder of the day was spent in getting it.

TUESDAY NIGHT, MAY 31st. Tuesday morning—afternoon—night. At last, Tuesday night.

Rafe and I stood waiting for Jonquil in the library. It was after eleven p.m. In a few minutes we should set out across the fields to where Count Dul's grave lay. From the Book he'd left it was clear that in England, as in his own native country, the Count had been excommunicated by the Church and his body buried therefore in unconsecrated ground. It was Jonquil's indefatigable curiosity that had discovered the grave with its broken headstone in one of Rafe's outlying meadows. It was this initial discovery that had first determined

her to carry out the remainder of the Book's instructions.

"Who actually found the metal box?" I asked now.

The constraint between Rafe and myself on this last day had made me desperate. He'd steadily avoided being alone with me until now, although I'd persistently sought such opportunity, for today Jonquil had, for the first time, weakened in her project.

Too obstinately proud to say outright she was afraid, she'd endeavored in roundabout ways to get Rafe to change his mind. He'd refused to rise to her bait, brushed aside her every tentative move toward canceling the date he'd determined to keep with his B.G.

But her wavering had given me a gleam of hope. Perhaps I might persuade him out of his insanely dangerous rendezvous even now. I felt sure Jonquil had given me this last chance to do so.

"Was it you who found the box?" I repeated.

He gave me a queer slanting look, half speculative, half sad.

"It found me," he laughed. "Slipped from the top of a bookshelf. I haven't the slightest recollection of seeing it in the house before. Never heard my father mention it. Must have been pushed out of sight somehow—it fell with a crash right at my feet and the Book and the B.G.'s heart rolled on the floor."

"Rafe! Don't go on with this. Even Jonquil doesn't want it now. You know—you surely know the risk. Why will you——"

He caught my eye, and changed color. I saw he was trying to bring himself to answer me, and waited. He began to speak in quick, almost stammering words.

"Yes, I know the risk. I know, old man, but—I must go on now. It's been heaven—these last six months with Jonquil—heaven! But it can't last. We married in haste, but I'm damned if I'll let her 'repent at leisure.' It's a million to one I'll come through—with money, or without it, tonight, but—she'll remember I've tried."

"Rafe! You can't . . . you won't——"

"I will. It's easier to die than to lose her. I can face any hell but that."

"But she's going to—to lose you. And she's afraid of that now. She'd be glad—thankful if you gave up."

He smiled, as he'd smiled a thousand times when I'd missed some obvious point.

"Dear old chap! You don't know Jonquil. She's temperamental—just working up to the proper goose-flesh mood for tonight's orgy. No use, John! I'd never live it down if I failed her now. She's a child, an adorable child. I've had more than most men—and I'm choosing the easiest way out."

Jonquil's light step sounded on the uncarpeted old stairway.

"Ready?" her shining curls appeared round the door. "It's after eleven o'clock. We ought to start."

We went out to the great, echoing hall; our feet, on the old-fashioned red tiles, clanked dismally.

"This the picnic basket?" Rafe took up Count Dul's box from an oak chest. "Got the champagne and oysters, dear? Right! Let's start."

THE night was cool, almost cold. Wind stirred in the tree-tops. Tall solemn elms on either side of the avenue whispered uneasily as we passed between their double ranks. Overhead a brilliant sky of stars, and a proud moon sailing in full majesty.

I wondered if any remote world up there was like the one I trod; if any other beings knew such bitterness and horror and evil as we did on our earth. I wondered if I could go on living here — alone, when Rafe—when Rafe——

Suddenly my dream blotted out moon, stars, and earth. . . . I had reached the end

of that awful valley — breathless, spent from long pursuit—before me a broken pathway descended to the lip of a yawning chasm. And along that path, walking with steady purposeful tread, a man's tall figure loomed. Rafe—it was Rafe! In agony I stumbled after him. . . .

My dream blew like mist from across my vision. I was back in a country lane with Rafe and Jonquil, under the full moon's menace, the moon that would presently light Count Dul from hell.

"Here's our field-path." Jonquil turned aside to an old stile of flat stones laid with gaps between to keep cattle from crossing.

We followed her, cut across a field to another stile and across it to the desolate overgrown rocky bit of wasteland that was our objective. In another minute Jonquil stopped and pointed.

"There! There it is!"

The white merciless moon showed up every grass-blade and flower and stone of the hummock before us. Nature had flung a poisonous pall over the dead, and even the moon's glare could not blanch the blotched evil of henbane, viper's bugloss and deadly nightshade, or the scarlet-spotted fungus on Count Dul's grave. A cracked and sunken headstone leaned awry at the head of it. The worn lettering showed only a few words of whatever inscription had been cut two hundred years ago—COUNT DUL . . . DIED 1738 . . . A WARNING TO ALL WHO READ . . .

Rafe looked at his watch, glanced up at the moon as it climbed to its fateful meridian. He'd doffed his armor once more. With mocking brilliant smile he looked down on the horrible grave and airily kissed his hand.

"Rafe!" Jonquil's brows went up in anxiety. "You *must* be serious."

"Darling! I'm sure the B.G. wouldn't like it. Think what a gay old dog he was in his time. Think how much he must have enjoyed himself to have tried for two centuries to get back again. Must make his little trip enjoyable, you know! About time I got to the front door to meet him. I suppose it's no use arguing any more—you won't go home?"

"For the hundredth time—no, dearest! You might take my rose-red emerald and run off with some other pretty lady."

She was looking up into his face and, even to my jaundiced eyes, was a sight to stir the blood of any man. For a second, Rafe's devil-may-care mask dropped, his dark burning eyes and drawn features showed such anguish that I started forward with a cry. This was my dream . . . his tall figure—so dear, so obstinate, so tragic — moving steadily onward to the edge of an abyss. . . .

At once he recovered himself. Behind the brilliant smile he turned to me I read entreaty. He wanted me to take Jonquil away. He was in terror of what she would see and hear, in terror that she might be endangered too. But I knew also, and it was the only poor comfort I had left, that he wanted me—needed me as he and I always needed each other in a tight corner.

No one on earth—nor from hell—should move me from that graveside, and I confess I was glad that Jonquil should be there also. I wanted to spare her nothing.

I hoped if Rafe did not survive that she too would be destroyed.

I don't know how much of my thoughts he read, but in any case she wouldn't have left with me. He turned away, opened the metal casket, lifted out of it the withered pulsing heart and set it down at the head of the grave under the deeply sunken headstone.

My fascinated gaze was held by the horrible little thing. I saw it throb and quiver to the beat—beat—beat of whatever infernal power quickened life in it. I saw

its dark withered walls gleam in the moonlight like tarnished copper.

At the other end of the grave, Rafe uprooted a clump of spotted henbane, set down a small black bowl and poured oil into it.

Jonquil's small hands clasped in excitement. She watched with dancing eyes, her curls ruffled about her eager flower-like face.

Rafe glanced at his watch again, smiled once more at Jonquil. He didn't look toward me—I was thankful for it.

"Now for my old B.G. Stand back! Stand back, there!" he waved an imperious hand. "Make way for the Count Dul—make way——"

He took from his pocket the crackling parchment on which the conjuration was written, its black lettering very plain in the moonlight, ran his eye over it for the last time, although I was certain every word of it was stamped deep in his memory.

His voice rang out as I'd heard it ring on the playing-fields when we were boys together:

For your sightless eyes—this Flame!

He stooped to set alight the oil in the black bowl.

For your fleshless bones—this Earth!

He scattered dry dark soil from the basket.

For your withered heart—this Blood!

He knelt, held out his left hand and slashed it with a knife until blood dripped upon the heart. Then he got swiftly to his feet. His loud voice challenged the dead:

Wake from your sleep, Count Dul!
Rise from your grave, Count Dul!
Return from the dead, Count Dul!
Give me wealth—wealth for my boon!

My body was turned to ice, my feet rooted to the ground, my whole being concentrated on Rafe's tall rigid figure standing at the graveside—at the mouth of hell.

His last word echoed and reverberated like an organ-note; louder — louder it swelled and boomed, until the quiet night hummed and quivered, and the poisonous grave-weeds slowly withered, blackened, lay in dust, until the earth beneath them cracked widely open and the burning oil shot up into a red roaring fire that was cold as wind off an ice-field and seemed to lick the stars.

It froze the tears on my cheek. It chilled even the unbearable anguish in my heart.

The heart—in the red flame's brilliance—shone, incandescent, fiercely alive, then vanished.

In that moment the flame sank to earth again, the noise of its burning ceased—silence far more ominous fell, while overhead the great moon looked down in passionless survey.

The grave yawned widely open; from its void rose a wisp of dark smoke that turned and wreathed and twisted and coiled in ever denser volume as it swelled and blew and eddied to and fro above the gaping grave, blind, purposeless, uncertain. Then a nucleus formed in the vaporous evil, a dull purplish-red heart-shaped glowing core about which the dark mist swiftly formed and re-formed to a tall swaying pillar—an imperceptibly growing outline—a recognizable human body whose white face of damnation stared into Rafe's, whose awful rotted hands reached out to touch, to hold, to bind him fast.

And now I could not distinguish Rafe from the smothering infernal Thing itself. It swirled about him. It covered head and hands and feet from sight. When he moved, he moved within the enveloping darkness. When his face turned to me I saw only the dreadful livid face of the dead.

Still I was frozen there, unable to speak, to move, to do more than see and hear the Thing that now moved forward with fixed pale staring eyes and loose dark lips that mouthed and laughed and whispered as it came.

I could not turn to look at Jonquil. I felt her arms about me, clutching—I felt her warm soft body pressed to mine, her face against my cold and empty heart. I heard her long shrieks echoing above the thin dry whisper of the Thing that steadily advanced—nearer—nearer.

It halted beside us. Now I could see Rafe's tortured eyes, his face and form behind the clouded horror that enfolded him—he was shut up inside it like a chrysalis in a dark cocoon. He was Count Dul—Count Dul was Rafe!

Next moment Jonquil was plucked from my side. Her body was flung down on the dew-wet earth, her curls gleamed as two hands met about her throat, choking a last thin cry. . . .

The Thing that killed her rose and moved back to the grave. Now I could see Rafe more distinctly beneath the wavering cloud of evil. His dreadful garment grew thin and patchy, drifted from him, lost density and outline as it hovered over the open grave.

And the grave's darkness sucked it down out of sight, back to the hell from which it came.

The yawning hole closed up. The ugly weeds grew rank again upon the hummock. A sunken headstone leaned awry at its end.

In the same moment, I was released and ran stumbling over the long grass to where Rafe lay huddled.

A MONTH later. Rafe was not dead. But he would have died—he *would* have died if that devil hadn't barred his way out!

By some infernal miracle, and after lying unconscious for a week, Rafe woke to full possession of his faculties. No memory was spared him of that fatal resurrection, or of Jonquil's unthinkable end.

He lives to remember it hour after hour, day after day, week after week.

For another two months his torture will endure. Then he will be hanged. That much is certain. He confessed to the murder of his wife and stands trial next week. He'll plead guilty and there'll be practically no defense. Neither he nor I mean to confess a word of the actual truth. It would condemn him to years and years of life as a criminal maniac—remembering—remembering. . . .

A murderer—and a millionaire! Oh, yes! Count Dul kept his promise. A will turned up when the Chief Inspector of Police was going through Rafe's papers in the library—the thing toppled off a bookcase at the inspector's feet. It stated that the count had left a legacy buried in the cellars of *Braunfel.*

The police dug it up. Emeralds! An astounding collection which was photographed and written up in every rag in the country.

The finest gem was a great rose-red emerald, cut square and set with diamonds as a pendant.

I burned the Book and the Conjuration. I threw the metal box into Lake Derwentwater. But I couldn't find the heart—I went over every inch of the grave and all round about it.

Rafe takes this as a sign Count Dul's power is expended. I'm thankful that he doesn't understand.

I know that devil will return somehow—somewhere! Jonquil's death means life for him. Her will to live is added to his own.

When Rafe dies, he will look for her—and never find her. Never. She is one with the Count now, part of his thought, his will, his enduring evil.

Whether I can learn his secret, learn enough to meet him—and destroy him—I don't yet know.

When I am left alone, it will be all that remains worth doing in a world of fear and shadows.

"Atmospheric disturbances are causing the destruction of sound waves in this valley."

The Web of Silence

By MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

The author of "The Three Marked Pennies" weaves an intriguing yarn about the mysterious pall of silence that lay like a blight on an American community, disrupting its normal life

THE thing was supposed to have started around noon, April the 11th. As a matter of scientific record, that is when it did start.

But to Jeff Haverty, editor of the *News*, to Mayor Tom Seeley, and the little valley town of Blankville (which name will serve in lieu of the real one), there was a prelude. It came a full week before the eleventh, April the 3rd to be exact, when

Mayor Seeley waved away his breakfast orange and opened the first letter in his stack of morning mail.

The shape of it caught his attention at once, as the sender doubtless intended. An odd-looking letter, it was only a single sheet of paper written on one side, folded into a three-cornered envelope, and sealed with the stamp. The handwriting was angular and had, as the mayor remarked, a slightly foreign aspect, as if the writer were more accustomed to the script of another language.

Scrupulously formal and precise, it might have been any ordinary business letter, except for its triangular envelope—and its outrageous content:

Mayor Thomas Seeley
Covington Arms
Blankville,—

Dear Sir:—

Please oblige me by placing two hundred and fifty thousand dollars ($250,000) *in new twenties and fifties in an ordinary oil-can painted a bright yellow. Drop this can, sealed with paraffin and containing the correct amount, from the river bridge facing upstream, no later than April 10th at midnight.*

In the event that you choose to regard this as an idle threat and refuse to comply with my request, I must warn you that the entire city of Blankville will straightway find itself in the grip of an unusual phenomenon.

Business, educational and civic affairs will be brought to a standstill—at a cost to your charming city somewhat in excess of the amount mentioned above. Ordinary living will be paralyzed completely. Accidents, painful and perhaps fatal, will undoubtedly occur to many of your populace.

I trust that these measures will not be forced upon me by your refusal to comply with my request. It would be most unwise, I assure you.

Very truly yours,
"DR. UBIQUE."

There was no other signature, simply "Doctor Everywhere;" and the postmark was a local one.

But Mayor Seeley, like every public figure great or small, had received dozens of crank-letters in his career. At a glance, this was merely another one of those. The vague threat, the demand for money, the melodramatic signature—all were characteristic. With a snort Blankville's mayor tossed it aside and opened his next letter.

That same day, April the 3rd, Jeff Haverty received a similar note, mentioning the demand from Mayor Seeley and urging him to publicize the matter. Haverty read it with a brief grin, he passed it on to one of his staff as a possible feature story, and promptly forgot it.

That was the real beginning—but it was not until a week later, that memorable Sunday of April the 11th, that either of the two men realized it.

SUNDAY. About twenty minutes to twelve.

It was a pleasant spring day, clear and a bit over-warm due to an unseasonable dry spell. Blankville—with its 30,000 inhabitants, two movies, six drug stores, and four public schools—is a religious town. Approximately two-thirds of its population, therefore, was in church that Sabbath morning in late spring. What happened in Jeff Haverty's church, as he describes it, was in fine what was happening all over town.

Haverty himself, he confides, was dozing a bit in his family pew, lulled by the soporific boom of the sermon. He had a headache—as, it developed later, had every person in Blankville that morning—just a dull throbbing, not worthy of com-

ment, which had been bothering him ever since he got up. It was pleasant to sit there in church, listening to the rise and fall of the pastor's voice. A clear voice, vibrant and oratorical. . . .

It was the abrupt cessation of it, Haverty says, which woke him with a start.

Blinking, he looked toward the pulpit and fumbled for his hymnal, believing the sermon was over. But suddenly he saw that the Reverend Doctor Hobbs had stopped talking in the middle of a sentence. Even now his lips still moved, but no words came out.

The pastor stood for a moment, flushed with embarrassment and clutching at his neck. Then, with an apologetic grin at his congregation, he gestured for the presiding elder to take over—by signs indicating that something was the matter with his larynx.

The elder, bald-headed and pompous, bustled forward, thumbing the pages of a hymn-book. Nodding for the organist to start the next hymn scheduled, he stepped up on the dais to announce the page and title. Beaming, hand raised for attention, he opened his mouth . . . opened it—and shut it slowly. Color rose to his round face as he, too, clutched at his throat—with a wild look at the pastor, who was eyeing this exhibition of mimicry without amusement.

The choir rose. The organist, struggling with a desire to giggle, bore down on her keys. But no sound issued from the instrument—no sound from the open mouths of the choir who gaped at each other, blank-faced with astonishment and a growing alarm.

By this time pandemonium had swept over the members of the congregation, who were discovering things for themselves.

An old lady leaped to her feet, dropping an umbrella—but no clatter accompanied its fall to the floor. A child in its mother's lap, sensing a disturbance it could not understand, opened its mouth in a lusty wail—inaudible even to the mother who, frightened, clutched the baby to her breast. Everywhere people were opening and closing their mouths like stranded fish. Cupped ears strained to catch even the faintest reassuring sound.

In a panic, now, the congregation made a concerted rush for the exits, driven by a feeling of claustrophobia that sudden quiet often induces.

But outside it was worse.

A tomb-like silence had fallen over Blankville. Nowhere was there so much as an echo of sound to alleviate the painful stillness.

After that first surge of panic, however, Haverty says, people began to grin and gesture at one another. Young Ralston, the bank teller, nudged him as he stood in front of the church, and passed a note scribbled hastily on an old envelope.

What's causing it? Ralston had written.

Damned if I know! ! ! Haverty scrawled in answer. *Certainly is spooky, isn't it?*

Sure is! Wonder how long it will last? the teller wrote.

Haverty held up five fingers, then ten. He shrugged, grinned. The teller nodded agreement, and strolled away to his parked car. Haverty, chuckling at the gyrations of everyone he met, made a bee-line for his newspaper office, composing mental headlines as he went.

STROLLING through the streets of Blankville must have been like stepping, alive, into a silent movie. Cars thundered by, as quiet as shadows. Dogs barked, without making a whisper of noise. Children yelled and shouted at one another, whistled, clapped their hands—but they might have been figures in a dream. There was an eery, unreal quality about the familiar streets, Haverty says. It grew oppressive as the expected "five-or-ten-minute" hush lengthened like the held breath of a scared diver. It made you want

to loosen your collar and gulp in a lungful of fresh air. It pressed against your face like a soft pillow, deadly, insidious, something you could not fight.

As he reached the *News* building, Haverty was composing an editorial in which the horrors of Devil's Island and solitary confinement formed a keynote. It was borne upon him that weird Sunday, he says, why men have gone mad under the weight of mere silence.

He had unlocked the office door before realizing, with a curse, that he could not summon his staff by telephone. When they did turn up (they would eventually, to cover such a story), the extra he planned would have to be got out by sign language and written direction and leg-work. An extra? If it went to press by the next day, it would require all manner of ingenuity!

Haverty fumed. And only then did he recall that tri-cornered letter with its polite demand and its mysterious warning. His face must have been a study as he stood there, key in hand, gazing up and down a busy traffic-tangled street more silent than the inside of a pyramid. "And unusual phenomenon . . . ordinary living paralyzed," phrases recurred to him. . . .

Haverty snorted, without sound. It was fantastic, absolutely incredible. No; that crank-letter had no connection with this eery silence. It was nothing more than a coincidence, and the people of Blankville, he decided, must not be further frightened by such an idea.

Stubbornly, then and there, he dismissed the sinister possibility and went about the lunatic business of getting out an extra with a deaf and dumb staff.

IT WAS on the streets by nightfall—a feat that speaks well for Haverty's resourcefulness. For it must have been a prodigious job getting that story together without the use of phones, with the reporters running helter-skelter all over the little city out of touch with the rewrite man, and with the office staff unable to exchange the slightest remark unless they wrote it down.

It was Haverty's idea, too, that the newsboys carry torches and large printed banners, in lieu of yelling:

"Extra! Extra! All about the Weird Silence!"

And those papers were a sell-out. The first page was given over to probable explanations of the bizarre phenomenon.

"Atmospheric disturbances are causing the destruction of sound waves in this valley"—advanced by a local know-it-all who had an answer to every question.

"Result of falling meteors," declared another—someone having found a hot meteorite in a cornfield outside the town.

"A change in the earth's speed of revolution is causing sound to operate on a frequency not attuned to the human ear. It will not last overnight!" from the local radio-station manager, frantic at the prospect of losing hundreds of dollars worth of advertising.

For radios were reduced to the value of cumbersome furniture in Blankville. Telephones were useless. The fact—stumbled upon by a switchboard girl—that Blankville voices could be heard over wire and wireless by persons outside the valley, only maddened everyone all the more, adding to the unsolved riddle. However, as everyone agreed, it could not last.

But it did last. At dawn the next day, the town of Blankville was still in the grip of that dead silence. More stories trickled in and were duly passed around, via the *News*.

On Maple Street a small child had been locked in a closet for sixteen hours, unable to make its frantic parents hear its knocks and cries.

On Argyle Circle, a visiting prima donna, practising her scales that memorable Sunday morning, had fainted dead

away when her famous voice went silent in the middle of a high C.

At the intersection of Fifth and Chestnut Streets, a man on a bicycle was killed by a truck whose warning horn could not be heard as it sped out of a side street.

An illiterate Negro worker was arrested Sunday night for stealing and torturing a pedigreed dog—which, he was finally able to convey by drawing a crude picture on the jail wall, he had merely found injured in an alley and was trying to return to its owner.

At the Blankville fire station, eight firemen, in silent concentration over a game of checkers, could not hear a box signal set off at the corner of Eighth and Shadowlawn—a duplex garage, which burnt to the ground in the silent dawn of Monday the 12th.

There was, too, the newly-wed couple, quarreling heatedly in their bungalow on Beech Street—so frightened by the abrupt cessation of both their voices that they fell into each other's arms, terrified into forgiveness.

And there was the story from Mercy Hospital: at noon Sunday a surgeon in the midst of a mastoid operation called twice for an instrument which the sterile nurse, of course, did not hand him, unable to hear or see his lips move under the gauze mask. Perspiring, snatching at it himself, the surgeon dropped it on the floor—a delay that almost cost the patient's life.

These were incidents, and relatively unimportant. But by Monday noon, with the weird silence still crouching over Blankville, Haverty began to realize its growing power.

All the stores, except the serve-yourself ones, were closed. There was a rush sale of paper and pencils, but very little else, it being too difficult to make the clerks understand what one wanted.

At the courthouse and city hall, all trials and public meetings were canceled. The three theatres were closed; no one cared to see a movie without sound to make it intelligible. All civic club meetings were postponed, indefinitely, because no one knew how long the silence would last, Schools, too, were closed; and the children who were Scouts were much in demand as instructors in code and semaphore. It was indeed exactly as that tri-cornered note had said it would be: the whole process of normal living, for 30,000 bewildered people, had to be readjusted as completely as though the town of Blankville had been whisked away and set down on another planet.

Tourists began to pour in by Monday noon. These—with the steady stream of Blankville natives who went hourly beyond the "sound limit" for the sheer pleasure of hearing noise again—made life a nightmare for the highway patrol. For, outside the valley, noises went on as usual. Passing back and forth across the "silence boundary" gave one a sharp headache, it was noted; but no one could offer a plausible reason why.

Inside the valley, within a radius of some five miles, quiet rested like a pall over everything. Silence that pressed down like a tangible force, smothering, nerve-racking, had the town by the throat. Like a helpless fly, Blankville was caught in a spider web of utter stillness from which there was no escape.

MONDAY passed. Tuesday. And then, Wednesday morning, Mayor Sceley received another three-cornered letter.

There it was in his morning mail, dated April the 14th, postmarked locally like the first—and equally polite, detached, and outrageous:

Dear Sir:—

I trust you are convinced by this time that the first letter to you was not an idle threat. The price remains the same,

$250,000, to be sealed in a yellow oil-can and thrown from the river bridge, facing upstream, at midnight as directed. Any deviation from these directions will inconvenience me, so I beg you to comply in detail.

A copy of this letter will be sent to the editor of your local newspaper. If he does not make it public, I shall use other methods. When the good inhabitants of Blankville hear of your failure to protect their interests, I hesitate to predict your political future.

Borrow the above-mentioned sum at once as a civic loan, and pay it back by bond issue, donation, or sales tax. That is no concern of mine. But $250,000 is a mere pittance compared with what your merchants, lawyers, theatre managers, etc., have already lost. And let me assure you that the phenomenon will remain as it is until you comply with my request. ....

Very truly yours,

"Dr. Ubique."

Mayor Seeley reread the letter and, mopping his florid brow, sent post-haste for Jeff Haverty—who had indeed received a similar note, and was frowning over it with a growing wonder.

One can imagine that conference: two wordy, excitable men, accustomed to yelling orders, closeted together in the mayor's inner sanctum without any means of verbal communication. Their pencils must have scratched frantically. Notes flew back and forth like snowflakes.

And that night, the whole Blankville police force, assisted by the National Guard and the highway patrol, threw a secret cordon around the entire city. They were looking, it leaked out, for an infernal machine of some sort. Several arrests were made. One young man, experimenting with television in the cellar of his home, spent a bad four hours of explaining at headquarters, in a little room reserved for such matters. But nothing else was found.

That same evening the *News* came out with a four-column cut of the two letters received by Mayor Seeley. The accompanying article, written by Haverty himself, was light and amused at the idea of a "mad scientist" hidden in their midst. But there was an undercurrent of gravity in the article, presenting the problem squarely to the harassed citizens of a town of silence.

Were they, in truth, the victims of a fantastic extortion plot?

After all, as Haverty pointed out, no one else had predicted any "unusual phenomenon" for April the 11th. If the letters had been written *after* the silence began, it might have been the work of a nervy opportunist. But that first letter had threatened them with a paralysis of normal living a full week in advance. And the threat had been weirdly carried out. No one could deny that.

THE inhabitants of Blankville read those pictured letters with growing awe. Nerves drawn taut by the strain under which they were living, they seized on this new explanation with excitement not unmixed with terror.

A madman in their midst! A clever, ruthless extortioner who, by some uncanny means, had destroyed all sound in their busy valley—as effective a monkey-wrench as was ever thrown into the machinery of an average American town!

"Doctor Everywhere!" The name was on every tongue—with various attempts at the Latin "Ubique." It was sinister, melodramatic. It caught at the imagination, and caused prickles of fear to run up and down the spine. Doors were locked. Children were not allowed out after dark. The police station was flooded with messages that a prowler had been seen lurking in alleys all over town. Every stranger was a suspect.

For, what was the monster like? Was he gaunt and cadaverous, like Dracula?

Fat and suavely cold-blooded? Or, as some suggested, could "Doctor Ubique" possibly be a woman? Was he a stranger, or someone they all knew and trusted?

His mysterious power of silence caused even more conjecture. How did he cause it? Chemicals? Electricity? A ray-gun of some kind, its projector located far from the city that was his prey? Everyone had a different opinion; anyone could be right, for no one knew.

And the net of silence tightened unbearably with the added idea that it was man-made and therefore could be stopped . . . for a price.

Thursday morning, letters began to pour into the *News* office. At last a delegation called upon Mayor Tom Seeley, perspiring and ill at ease without the glib oratory of his profession. Sternly he was rebuked—in the written proclamation handed him by the silent foreman—for keeping that first threat-letter a secret. And, flatly, he was ordered to act, and act in a hurry.

Pay the ransom: that was the opinion of an overwhelming majority. If the weird silence continued, said the proclamation, Blankville would become in truth the ghost-town it seemed. For everyone was deciding to move out of the eery little valley. Property was one thing. Living in ghostly quiet, day in, day out, and rearing one's children to be deaf-mutes: that was something else. Besides, it was costing everyone a fortune to carry on work in such an unnatural manner. A few businesses, which depended entirely on sound, would be ruined.

The silence, said Blankville, must go—or they would. And if the release could be effected by the payment of a quarter-million dollars, it must be done at once. At any rate, there was no harm in trying—to which even the cautious Mayor Seeley agreed.

And so, Thursday night, April the 15th, was chosen. The Farmer's Trust and the First National banks combined to make the loan, in new twenties and fifties. And every filling-station proprietor in Blankville importantly came forward with an oil-drum painted a brilliant yellow to be used as the sealed container.

THURSDAY night. Four days after the silence first occurred. Four of the strangest days an ordinary American town ever spent.

Thursday night. Everyone was ordered to stay indoors during the hour agreed upon. And so, at eleven-thirty, everyone turned out in a body to watch Mayor Seeley stand on the Municipal Bridge that joined west and east Blankville, staring down at the dark river below. Authorities blustered, herded, shooed, perspired—but they might have known they could not keep Blankville in bed while their civic leader handed over a small fortune to a shadowy figure who, even now, moved among them at will.

The population turned out in full force, lining up along the river banks and peering over one another's heads with a kind of shivery enjoyment. It was like a parade or a dedication, except that in all that milling, shoving crowd there was not a whisper of sound. No cheering. No whistling. No shuffle of feet or murmur of many voices. Like a congregation of ghosts, visible now and then as lightning flickered over the cloudy sky, they stared up at the cement bridge, white against the darkness. Blocked off by uniformed police at either end, it spanned the river. In its center, with two uniformed men carrying the yellow can, Mayor Seeley peered over the railing and waved solemnly.

By the dim light of the clouded moon, he balanced the yellow can, its precious contents sealed inside, on the rail for a moment. It must have been impressive, that soundless pantomime. Haverty—who was one of that eagerly watching crowd—says

he will never forget it. A can containing a quarter-million dollars, being dropped into the swirling current of a muddy river, and from there to . . . where? No one could dive into a river, in plain sight of 30,000 people, and drag out a heavy cumbersome object like a weighted oil-can! Suppose it sank, bedded deep in river ooze where no one could find it. . . .

Mayor Seeley waved. Then, solemnly, he gave the balanced can a shove. It fell with a silent splash, went under, stayed under.

Everyone stared, spell-bound, for twenty-odd minutes, watching the ripples spread out from the spot where it fell. Bridge lights shimmered on the widening circles. Lightning, flickering across the sky, lighted each wondering face. A few drops of rain spattered down, unnoticed.

There was nothing to see; no hand clad in white samite which reached up out of the water, brandishing a handful of currency, as Haverty remarked. Nothing but silence, dense and oppressive, as the rain—the first in several weeks — pelted down upon that tense deaf-mute throng, drenched but still unwilling to leave and seek shelter from the downpour.

And then . . . someone coughed. An *audible* cough.

For a full minute the significance of it did not strike those who heard. Then, like a cackling of geese, voices suddenly broke into an excited babble. A cheer went up, deafening and full of pent-up nerves.

"He's done it! He's taken it away!" everyone was yelling. "The silence is gone!"

A wave of sound rose, the impact of it battering against ears so long attuned to stillness. As msyteriously as it had come, the web of silence was lifted, and Blankville was once more a busy ordinary little American city—minus a quarter-million of its capital. "Doctor Ubique" had fulfilled his weird contract to the letter, and now his fee lay somewhere at the bottom of the river. No hidden boat shot out to retrieve it. No supernatural force parted the waters to reveal its hiding-place. Shivering there in the rainy darkness, the people of Blankville wavered between comfort and a gnawing curiosity.

"Where is he?" awed murmurs ebbed and flowed about Haverty.

"Why doesn't he get it? Afraid he'll be caught in the act, eh?"

"How can he get it? It's sunk now. He'll have to drag the river for it. . . ."

"Maybe they've caught him already. . . ."

And then someone shouted. Other voices took up the cry. Fingers pointed. Those in back jostled those along the bank, craning their necks to see. A hundred flashlights trained their beams on the river, where something yellow and cylindrical was bobbing along heavily on the current.

"The can! It's the money! Get it! Go get it, somebody!" shouts rose in chorus.

Before anyone else could make a move, two uniformed police, in an outboard motor concealed and ready for such an emergency, shot out into midstream and towed the floating object ashore. The yellow oil-can it was, sealed tight with paraffin. People crowded close, ordered back by the police, as the top was pried loose. Then, as the heavy container was upended, a murmur of awe swept over the throng.

For the yellow can was empty, quite empty, save for a single copper penny that rattled and rolled on the bottom.

THAT was all Haverty was waiting for. Juggling mental headlines, he elbowed his way through the crowd, making another bee-line for his newspaper. His staff was waiting, with the story half written, when he reached the *News* office. Silence that had cloaked the big news room for four strange days was replaced by the familiar click of typewriter and teletype.

He had been seated at his desk, scrawl-

ing headlines, for perhaps ten minutes when his phone rang. It was Mayor Seeley, phoning en route home from his ceremony on the bridge. The plump mayor sounded furious and ineffectual.

"Jeff," he growled, "they'll want my scalp for this. A quarter of a million dollars, gone . . . where? I wish I had that —that fellow by the neck, whoever he is! A wholesale hold-up, think of it! I was so sure we'd catch him when he—I'll have somebody's badge for this!" He calmed down with an effort, adding wearily: "Come over to my office. You can swing public opinion my way; make them see I was helpless in the hands of this—this lunatic, this scientific bandit!"

Haverty drove to the courthouse in record time—blowing his horn at intervals, he admits sheepishly, for the sheer pleasure of hearing noise again. Mayor Seeley was waiting for him on the steps, mopping the rain from his face and muttering under his breath. Their footsteps echoed hollowly as they strode down the hall, and Seeley fumbled for the key to his office.

"There's this about it," the mayor growled. "If this Doctor Ubique, as he calls himself, can do it once, he'll do it again! What town will be his next victim?"

"Yes," Haverty was saying with a scowl of gravity. "A weapon like that, wielded against an entire town! It's far and away the boldest extortion plot I ever——"

Under Seeley's hand the light clicked on —and whatever Haverty was going to say hung suspended in midair. The *News* editor's mouth hung open.

There on his desk, muddy and dripping with river slime, sat a yellow oil-can sealed with paraffin, an exact duplicate of the one hauled from the river by the two police.

Haverty leaped forward. But he knew, somehow, before he pried open the lid that it contained $250,000 in new twenties and fifties. They were all there, carefully wrapped in a rubber bag where Seeley had put them in case the sealed top leaked.

And beside the yellow oil-can lay a tri-cornered letter, unstamped, addressed merely: *"To Whom It May Concern."*

Without a word, Jeff Haverty ripped open that letter and read it aloud, his voice echoing eerily in the quiet building:

To Whom It May Concern:

I hope the good people of Blankville will forgive my little whimsy at their expense. Truly I had no wish to harm or to inconvenience anyone, and certainly not to rob them of their honest gain.

I am a scientist, an astronomer of some note in my own country (which is, I may add, halfway across the world from your charming city, in case you have any plans for legal reprisal). In my private observatory, somewhat larger than the largest now in public use, I study the heavenly bodies and make certain calculations which I shall publicize at my death.

These calculations, based on years of research, led to my discovery of an interesting new star in the constellation Aquila —a nova gaining in brightness, due to some internal outburst of which I have not been able to determine the cause. Its increase in brightness over a four-day interval promised to be about 60,000 fold.

Quite by accident, I made a remarkable discovery about this star. A certain mineral, similar to pitchblende, is so susceptible to its magnified rays that a sharp vibration is set up shortly after contact. Only when the mineral is thoroughly wetted does this vibration cease—an inaudible humming, so alien to the human make-up that it renders the eardrum useless.

My nova was increasing in brightness, so I hurriedly made inquiries as to the location of spots on our planet where this mineral desposit was plentiful. Several were given me as a choice, but unfortu-

nately it had rained at all of these localities save one, your small valley of Blankville here in the American states. As it was rich in this peculiar metal—and as my nova was steadily increasing its brightness and power—I hurried to Blankville to witness the effect when the rays from this star reached full power to impregnate the metal without being magnified.

I came to your city for the sole purpose of observing this contact. That was all. But in mingling with your people (a rather stodgy unimaginative lot, who place more value on money than on truth), it occurred to me to play a little prank on the entire city. Hence my first letter to your excellent mayor, demanding a large sum of money and threatening the town with an "unusual phenomenon."

My "silence"! (Actually, I had no way of knowing it would work out!) But I have had many a quiet chuckle at your expense, reading the learned explanations offered in your local paper concerning the "mysterious destruction of sound waves," etc. You comprehend? The ray from this star simply impregnated the metal in this valley (parched by a long dry spell), with some sort of electric charge, causing the atmosphere to vibrate in a peculiar way. The human ear, unused to such vibrations, rebelled.

Therefore, Blankville was not a city of silence. It was merely a city of the deaf. Sounds went on as before, but no one exposed to those vibrations could hear them.

I was annoyed that my first letter to your mayor had no effect; so I wrote another, saying, in fine: "I told you so!" Your reception of it has afforded me great amusement and delight—especially the way my foolish little trick of legerdemain with the two oil-cans baffled you. What I did, of course, was drop a duplicate can into the river to draw your attention from the real one, which I later drew ashore in the sunken net placed to catch it.

At no time did I harbor any intention of keeping the money for my own use, although by your standards I am not a rich man. He who has truth at his fingertips has little regard for material things, however, as I believe my small prank has taught you.

Had one of you known what I knew, you would not have been the victims of my "extortion plot."

For, as you now are aware, I did not control the "silence" as a supernatural weapon. I could no more have caused it than I could have stopped it. A very obliging rain abetted me in my little whimsy, dampening the dry atmosphere and relieving the pressure on everyone's eardrums—at the psychological moment. If it had not rained, Blankville would still be caught in my web of silence. Likewise, if your good mayor had waited another night to pay the "ransom," my "fiendish power" would have been destroyed.

So now, I must bid you all farewell and return to my work. I herewith return the $250,000 *(you may also keep the penny in the other yellow can!) Since it has been collected for civic betterment, I hope that you will use it for the common good—may I suggest building a public observatory in which your good people may study the heavens (!)*

Happiness to you all, and I hope you will forgive my little joke.

"Dr. Ubique."

In the quiet office Mayor Tom Seeley looked at Jeff Haverty. The editor looked at the mayor.

Haverty's lip twitched. Seeley choked.

And then, in chorus, they burst out laughing—clung to each other, shaking with laughter that echoed and re-echoed later, over the little valley town of Blankville when Haverty made public the true nature of their web of silence.

All the time that voice kept shouting, "Faster, faster!"

The Haunted Car

By DAVID BERNARD

An unusual tale of psychic perception and a daring crime, and the frightful obsession that gripped the driver of a haunted Buick

"Hauntings . . . the psychic trace of some violent and emotional scene, persisting we do not know how in the spot where it occurred."
—*Professor Julian Huxley.*

"I TELL you, there is nothing wrong with you."

As he spoke, taking the stethoscope from his ears, Doctor Harvey Potter's white-mustached face creased with a smile meant to reassure his patient. The patient, pallid, youngish Mark Sanders, pulled the shirt over his skinny chest and squirmed on the stool facing the physician. His jaw sagged as Doctor Potter added:

"Nothing wrong—physically, that is."

"Then I'm—what I fear?" Sanders' thin voice cracked.

"No-o," the doctor drawled, smiling. "Not losing your mind. Nervousness, overwork——"

"But, Doctor—that voice, in the car—now, my terrible dreams. Before that, I wasn't nervous, like this." Hands—bluish, clammy, tremulous—were extended as evi-

dence. "Things, feelings, come on me now—that I thought I was rid of years ago, before my marriage, when I outgrew my susceptibility to impressions from"—Sanders hesitated, aware of Doctor Potter's scientific skepticism toward his belief, then added, in almost a whisper—"from the—other world."

Doctor Potter clapped one large hand over his patient's frail shoulder. "We'll straighten this all out. But you must work with me."

Silently finishing dressing, Sanders stiffened, throwing his chest out. A smile won its way to his lips. "What do you mean to do?" he asked timidly.

The doctor replied by leading him into the comfortably furnished anteroom. Not until they were resting deep in the plushy sofa, Sanders nervously drawing on a cigarette, did the physician begin to explain:

"You, Sanders, are an intelligent man. With another I'd probably trust to time and faith in a mysterious prescription. But I can, and therefore do, appeal to your intellect. Strange, even frightening, as your trouble may seem, it has, I'm convinced, a rational basis. I'm convinced it's no more than a—well, a psychological quirk that your fears and, I dare say, your beliefs have invested with an air of reality.

Sanders inhaled very deeply, obviously terribly anxious to believe the doctor, who went on:

"The start of it—if we, er, overlook your 'voices from the other world' when you were younger—was on High Bridge Road——"

"Yes. There, I first heard it—that voice—so clear—and that strange impulse at the wheel——"

"Exactly." Doctor Potter stood up, studying the excited, peaked face. "Therefore, we start now, tonight, to break that silly obsession. We will drive along High Bridge Road, in the very place. You, Sanders, will drive your car."

2

THE Buick sedan's headlights were vivid antennæ groping through blackness as Sanders steered up the steep street that formed one of the many approaches to broad High Bridge Road.

"Fine motor," Doctor Potter said, shaking his head pitifully at the rigid driver beside him. Easier to give a sensitive child nasty medicine, he thought, continuing in his effort to distract Sanders from his fear. "Used cars evidently can be worth while."

"My wife bought it while I was on the road," Sanders grumbled. "It is a bargain—mechanically. But—oh, well——" he paused helplessly.

Doctor Potter's eyes followed the sweep of the lights up the incline, taking in the sleek, impressively designed engine hood. A beautiful, new-looking car. Yet, from the outset, Sanders kept insisting, he had "felt" something foreboding, unclean, evil about it; a sensation—if, indeed, sensation it could be called—climaxing in Sanders' strange experience on High Bridge.

The brakes slammed the sedan to a jarring halt. Sanders gaped shamefacedly at the doctor. The car was nosed into the intersection that marked the summit of the approach. Brilliantly illuminated, High Bridge Road stretched out left and right.

"Come, man," the doctor coaxed, firmly. At length Sanders shifted. The purring motor roared; the car lurched into traffic, one in the widely spaced procession headed for distant High Bridge.

Sanders muttered, aside: "There, ahead, nearing the incline of the bridge, that night—I began to feel dizzy and faint. That terrible feeling of—death—smothering, frightful death—that I dream about now—came over me. Suddenly, as if from a great way off, the voice came to me. It was so clear—in a sudden rush—as if I had suddenly tuned in a station with terrific power; just as if somebody beside me was

screaming in my ear—hoarse, and cursing vilely. 'Faster! Faster!' That's what it shouted.

"A cloud seemed to sweep over and through me. Pain—terrible, burning, cutting pain—like being stabbed time and again in my neck and back. . . . And all the time that voice, shouting, 'Faster, faster!' I was dying, I felt. Somehow, just as I was losing consciousness, I managed to stop the car. It was a miracle the car didn't crash. I——"

"Easy, man!" Doctor Potter cried, noting the unexpected acceleration of the car. They were whizzing up the incline of High Bridge. Sanders' response was a crazy sweep of the speedometer needle past 55.

"Slow down, Sanders!" Doctor Potter commanded as the Buick reached well over mile-a-minute speed. And with that, the car swerved left, hurtling toward the bridge summit, between the "overtaking" lane of the approaching autos and the similar lane of the oncoming cars!

Sanders, muscles knotted in hands and face, held his face unswervingly forward, the steering-wheel in a grip of death. And the car picked up speed! Frenziedly Doctor Potter fought to get the wheel in his hands, noticing as he did, that Sanders was beginning to writhe like an epileptic in the throes.

A groan shot from Sanders' twitching mouth, to be repeated again and again—signals of deep-seated, violent pain. And, to add to the chaos, the piercing wail of a siren sounded above the motor's din.

The Buick barely missed an oncoming bus. Giving up his useless effort to win the wheel from the berserk driver, Doctor Potter clutched desperately for the emergency brake. With a death groan, Sanders slumped all at once, surrendering the wheel, slumping toward the open window at his left.

Doctor Potter held the limp body, grabbing the brake with his right and tugging madly. The driverless sedan catapulted across the advancing line of cars—headlong for the walk paralleling the bridge road.

Rubber sent up its smell as tires screeched and the doctor prayed. The Buick swayed, skidded; the oncoming drivers braked and swerved wildly to avoid it. By God's grace alone the Buick got across the line of cars. Over the curb it bounced as it slowed, rocking on two wheels. Then, as if weary of its mad adventure, it stopped dead, bumper nestled harmlessly against the railing overlooking the river a hundred yards below.

The siren cut off sharply. A bluecoat stared into the car, shouting angrily. Doctor Potter, pulling the unconscious Sanders from the seat, answered the officer's cries about speeding and reckless driving with:

"This man must get hospital attention—at once!"

3

WITH an unavoidable deference, such as he had not experienced since his distant days in medical school, Doctor Harvey Potter hung intently on every syllable uttered by the elderly little man seated behind the glass-topped desk facing him. The little man, Professor Karl Rueder, eyed his listener sharply, fingers intertwining and opening quickly as he spoke.

"Of course," the world-renowned psycho-analyst went on, his words thickened by the accents of his native European tongue, "for you such things are difficult to accept—principally because such happenings are beyond your accustomed realm of experience."

"I admit I'm all at sea," Doctor Potter inserted politely, "which is why I have asked for your opinion. There he was—in the car—as if possessed."

"He *was*—possessed."

"Yet—now—two days later, he's normal."

"*Normal?* A man with his history of mediumistic sensitivity, a decided neurotic —normal?"

Doctor Potter bridled slightly. Reluctantly he admitted, "What you say, Professor, is true—yet—I am forced to, well, discount Sanders' talk about 'sounds from the invisible world' and whatnot that supposedly affected him in his youth. I can't——"

Professor Rueder interrupted the physician with an impatient wave of hands quite incongruous in one habitually so reserved and scholarly in manner. Acidly he said:

"For ages, centuries uncounted, such things have occurred. Rapport with the dead, baffling cures, so-called miracles, magic, a host of unexplained phenomena. Indisputable witnesses have authenticated these things; but all have been discounted, as you say, by so-called authorities. And why? Because to admit them would mean to upset the accepted canons and dogmas of science and formal religion.

"Look what I have encountered—since publishing my latest book. Scorn, ridicule —one critic writes, 'Rueder has grown soft cerebrally'—because I have concluded in a study of over ten years that the so-called superstitions and mystic beliefs of mankind have solid, factual basis. As for you, surely the other night you had proof positive of something demanding a, we shall say *superphysical*, explanation—else why have you come to me?"

Doctor Potter nodded humbly. "Yes —but, well—the idea of a car being *haunted*——"

Professor Rueder smiled wryly. "I said no such thing. I say that the facts you have brought to my attention prove that this automobile must influence, for reason or reasons to be disclosed, your patient in a strange and, I daresay, evil way."

"But—how?"

"Not 'how?'—but 'from what?'" Professor Rueder said reprovingly. "I need not apologize for the teachings of modern physics that all matter is in essence electromagnetic, nor the teachings of many modern experimental psychologists that thought is wave-like in nature, capable of transcending the limits of the body and the body's senses. I go further, saying with the ancient teachers of India and Egypt that thought is the most potent force in the universe; that it impresses itself upon the electromagnetic substance, the essence of matter, surrounding the person who created the thought or thoughts. The vibrations of the brain are thus impressed upon nature's recording-tablet—upon the electromagnetic screen—just as light vibrations impress a picture upon a sensitive photographic plate. And the stronger the thought, the more vivid the picture.

"Call it haunting if you wish. It alone will explain the facts of such cases as I have put into my book; cases in which, as I have authenticated carefully, the acts of passionate men have been repeated, in the very places in which they first did their acts —years after they were dead and buried. Shakespeare was correct in a scientific sense when he said, 'The evil that men do lives after them.' For since evil acts invariably find men most single-minded and strong in their thinking and acting, the imprint left on the invisible screen of the universe lives on the more vividly and powerfully."

Abruptly the professor softened.

"Here," he extended a thick, smoothly bound volume to the doctor, "is a copy of my book."

Doctor Potter turned Professor Rueder's book in his hand, reading the jacket: *The Unseen Side of Life.*

"Read it," the professor said, "and read, too, some of the many works to which I have referred—but read, if you can, with a mind that is open."

Murmuring his thanks, Doctor Potter found his mind at grips with ideas he customarily would have rejected as the product

of an untutored or unbalanced mind. But the combined effects of Mark Sanders' experience and the firm words of the eminent psycho-analyst made disbelief come hard.

As he stood up, he asked:

"But why, then, hasn't Sanders been so affected before? After getting the car he drove it clear to the coast and back."

The professor raised his slight shoulders. "You have, to be sure, a problem. But did you not say that Sanders said he sensed something 'evil'—a weird feeling of decay, death—about the car? However, about the experience you witnessed, it would surely pay you to find out the history of the automobile. Given the appropriate circumstances and place, the influence I have spoken of will manifest through the sensitive person or medium. I would suggest, however, that Sanders be kept out of the car."

Doctor Potter forced a smile. "He'll never drive it again, he swears. He's at a hotel in town with his wife. Well——"

Doctor Potter was shortly on his way home, book under arm, grimly resolved to hew to the most difficult of courses: study unfamiliar, heterodox ideas with a mind free from prejudice and preconception.

4

WRONGLY or rightly, it was with a mind considerably altered and immeasurably more humble that Doctor Potter, later in the week, approached an address given him by Mark Sanders. He scanned the sign over the door:

BERGER'S BARGAINS IN
RECONDITIONED CARS

He entered the large showroom lined neatly with new-appearing, used automobiles. A flashily dressed youth slouched from a wicker chair to meet the doctor. There was, Doctor Potter noted, the inescapable suggestion of the rodent in the youth's uneven, unsteady small eyes and thin, sparsely mustached face.

In response to the side-of-mouth query of the salesman, Doctor Potter said he'd like to see the proprietor.

"Who—Berger? What for?"

Doctor Potter repeated the request. Smiling crookedly, the young man slouched to the showroom's rear, slid open a door and called out a name.

The young man then led the doctor to a wicker chair and soon a red-faced fat man came hurrying toward him. He squinted suspiciously at Doctor Potter while the latter introduced himself, then sank his short, heavy body into the chair close by.

"You keep a record of every car you sell, do you not?" Doctor Potter asked.

"Yeah, sure, got to—why?"

"I'm anxious to trace a car purchased from you."

Berger thought a moment, then asked cautiously, "And what might that be?"

"A Buick sedan, 1937 model——"

"What?" Berger leaned forward, as if incredulous.

"Why—a Buick sedan—sold to a Mrs. Mark Sanders last July——"

Berger jumped erect, unaccountably excited, mumbling as he backed away: "Just one minute. Just a minute——" He began to run to the rear.

The doctor, puzzled, stood up. Berger emerged from the back, shouting as he approached Doctor Potter.

"No you don't! Sit down there!"

Doctor Potter saw an automatic aimed at him in Berger's pudgy fist.

He obeyed the shouted order to sit. "What's the meaning of this?" he demanded, anxiously eyeing the waving automatic.

"You'll f-find out," Berger spluttered. The salesman came hurrying over with a loud "What's up, Boss?"

"This old guy here—says he's an M.D. —just asked for *the* Buick sedan."

The information set the rat-faced youth gaping at Doctor Potter. He turned to his employer: "Wh-whatcha gonna do?"

"I'll keep'm covered. You call up Harrison, that Government man. The number's by the phone. Hurry!"

The youth hesitated. Berger, face pouring sweat, shouted: "Hurry, damn it!"

"You're making a terrible mistake," Doctor Potter exploded. "I warn you to consider what you're doing!"

"Yeah, Boss," the young man added, craftiness creeping over his face. "Might mean a charge for false arrest."

Berger was impressed. "But—this federal guy—he give me strict orders. You know the cops was after the Buick——"

"But maybe he," the salesman nodded at Doctor Potter, "ain't in with Fenner——"

"Then why's he askin' about the Buick?"

"I told you," Doctor Potter stormed. "Say! Watch out with that gun! I told you I came in the interest of my patient."

"Who's that?" sharply queried the salesman. He added, as the doctor gave the information, "Where's this Sanders live?"

Patiently the physician gave the address. The salesman turned to the befuddled Berger. "I guess I'd better call the G-man," he said, striding toward the office in the back.

Had one followed him, he would have been seen to make two phone calls. The first was *not* to the federal agent.

5

"AND that," Doctor Potter concluded wearily, following a brief but very comprehensive inquisition at the hands of Federal Agent Harrison, "explains just why I came here to inquire about an auto I never saw before last week."

Gray felt hat shoved far back on his jet-black hair, the G-man fixed his steady gaze on the doctor's face. Doctor Potter, who happily had found the man immeasurably less pugnacious than his square, wide jaw made him seem, asked anxiously, "You don't—doubt me?"

The federal man grinned almost boyishly. "Your veracity—no; but the basis of your story—well—I can't see how that sedan and your patient's fits can have any connection."

"Not the car itself." Doctor Potter spoke with the zeal of a converted religionist. "The invisible influence permeating the car—oh!" he groaned, noticing the skeptical grunts of Harrison and the attentive Berger, "I was skeptical too. But," he glowed with a sudden thought, "in your work you surely must know about certain places—prison cells, where inmates again and again give into a terrific urge to kill themselves, or go mad trying to resist the impulsion to suicide." Vaguely Doctor Potter realized he was quoting almost verbatim from Professor Rueder's book.

"I have known such places," agreed Harrison, shrugging. "Suggestion."

"Yes—but by what? In some way, yet to be explained, the violent acts of strong, passionate men impress the ether-like substance, in that way permanently affecting the surrounding environment——"

Interrupting with a grimace, the G-man asked, "What happened, you're saying, in that car—that is, the violence in it, would explain your patient's fits?"

"Yes, you could put it that way. Your information about what happened in the car would therefore help me to cure my patient—so I believe."

The G-man laughed, showing his even, white teeth. "I'm no man of theory, let alone what seems like spiritualistic theory. But plenty happened in that car. That sedan was driven by Nick Rago and Bugs Fenner this past summer when they got tangled up in the Isham kidnap case."

Mention of the Isham case stimulated Doctor Potter's memory. The two-year-old infant, ruthlessly stolen from his crib, missing one week before word came from the kidnapers. A note, asking for a small fortune in small bills, to be delivered at a designated spot. Many headlines, tapering off into little-noticed articles in the press, becoming in time another true story of agony, violence and lawlessness—an unsolved mystery.

"I was assigned," Harrison explained. "You see, the Government hangs on, even though the public forgets. We knew when the Isham family got the ransom note. We let the family follow the directions. But we were waiting for the car that stopped on the road to pick up the bundle of money thrown out to them. We chased the car—it was the Buick sedan—and caught it up on High Bridge——"

"Why—exactly where Sanders——"

"Coincidence," reproved the G-man. "Our bullets riddled the man at the wheel. We had to answer their fire. That was Nick Rago. The Buick went wild and wrecked on the bridge rail. Fenner lived. We put him in the hospital to mend."

"But Fenner——"

"Fenner always was a fox," Harrison went on. "He denied the kidnaping. He surrendered the money, and never changed his story that he and Rago were only out to extort money from the Isham family. Of course," he added bitterly, "we have never found the poor baby——"

"And Fenner was jailed for extortion?"

"He was never tried," Harrison snorted. "The local police were a little lax, maybe a little jealous of the F. B. I. Fenner, his arm in a plaster cast, escaped under their noses from the hospital just last week. We'll get him—but we haven't done so yet."

Doctor Potter's brow furrowed. "Still—why your great interest in the sedan now?"

"Why — I'm convinced absolutely that Fenner did that job, despite his nice story to beat a sentence of death. A clue turned up last month, late but welcome. A contractor told us a sedan, which he thought was a Buick sedan, drove past a house he was working on near the Isham home—on the evening the baby was kidnaped. The car left tracks in some concrete this man was having mixed.

"I came to see Berger, here, who had bought the Buick at police auction. I wanted to match the tires with those tracks."

"Did they match?" the doctor asked eagerly. Harrison smiled.

"You forget your patient's case history, Doctor. By that time Sanders and his wife, having bought the car from Berger, were on a tour somewhere west of the Rockies. Some papers printed the news of the clue. I figured that Fenner, after escaping, would be very anxious to get hold of the car—which is why you were held, Doctor."

He stood up. "Now—lead me to this patient of yours. I'm going to give those tires a close check."

6

SEATED beside the G-man in a sturdy Chrysler sedan, Doctor Potter bubbled over. As he spoke, Harrison listened politely, and yawned.

"Surely," Doctor Potter pressed, "it's more than mere coincidence, where the car wrecked each time. Then, your bullets riddled Rago, at the wheel. That would account for the stabbing pains Sanders felt——"

"And the voice?"

"That would be Fenner, shouting at Rago."

Harrison laughed. "Far-fetched as your theories are, they give me goose-flesh. A car—haunted."

"Haunted?" The doctor spoke dreamily, more to himself. "So unnaturally sensitive,

nervous, Sanders was like a radio set, vibrating in response to the impulses set up in the car and the immediate vicinity of High Bridge. 'The appropriate circumstances,' Professor Rueder told me. Marvelous. . . . But what, after all, is known about mind, matter, the soul?"

"This is the address," interrupted Harrison, braking smoothly.

Doctor Potter led the federal agent into the hotel, up to Sanders' rooms. Mrs. Sanders greeted them.

"The car again," she said somewhat annoyedly, after Doctor Potter had explained their mission. "Why, Mark just left with a man who was anxious to buy the car."

She peered curiously at Doctor Potter. "Why—he introduced himself as Joseph Green—he said you sent him up here——"

Doctor Potter shook his head in denial, but Harrison snapped: "Describe this fellow!"

"Why—stocky, high cheek-bones—and his right coat-sleeve hung limp, as if his arm was gone, or in a sling——"

"Fenner!" snapped Harrison. "Quick! Where'd they go?"

The bewildered Mrs. Sanders gave the address of the garage. "The car's been there since—that night. Mr. Green's friend drove——"

Doctor Potter whirled to follow the G-man, who was racing for the stairs. Seconds later, he was seated beside Harrison, whizzing through traffic.

"Fenner must be damn anxious to switch those tires," Harrison hissed as he steered, "but we'll be at that garage before he can monkey with that Buick."

In a few moments they were at the curb outside the runway of the Parker Garage. A man ducked from behind the telephone pole close by and ran down the broad runway into the garage, shouting and whistling.

Harrison raced into the garage, followed by Doctor Potter. Far down the spacious garage was the Buick sedan they sought.

It was out of the line of parked cars, nosed toward the runway that led up into the street at the far side of the garage. Standing in front of the car was a man whose right sleeve flapped emptily at his side. Beside him was Mark Sanders.

Fenner looked toward the advancing G-man as the strange man ran down the runway, shouting. Into the car went Sanders, prodded by the gun in Fenner's left hand.

Uselessly the doctor cried, "He's making him drive away!"

Harrison stopped, swearing futilely as Fenner lunged to the seat beside Sanders, and the sedan, back-firing deafeningly, bolted for the runway to the far street.

Harrison spun, sprinting back to his Chrysler. He was shifting gears just as Doctor Potter got seated beside him. Harrison turned quickly and sent his car roaring for the avenue—a good thirty seconds after the Buick sedan went zooming past, headed uptown.

Traffic lights faded, glared red, but neither car slackened, the Buick holding its lead as they tore into wide Parkside Avenue.

The road turned several times; the iron hand of Harrison picked up precious yards each time, drawing to within six blocks. Then, with breath-taking suddenness, the Buick skidded and turned, right into one of the many tree-shaded park drives.

Harrison had to brake to avoid traffic sweeping out of the lane; then he swung to the chase.

The sedan, as they rounded the first bend in the park road, was a gray streak, nearly a half-mile up the winding tree-massed road. On the sparsely trafficked road, with no side exits, it became a contest of motors. The Chrysler, a newer model, commenced to close the gap. Harrison had the accelerator hard against the

floor, the springs humming a warning dirge as the road twisted and turned.

License plate numbers were visible now on the catapulting Buick. The staring Doctor Potter saw a white puff. Harrison's strong arm pulled the doctor's head forward and down. There came a sharp *crack!* And again grim evidence on the windshield of Fenner's marksmanship.

A red light loomed boldly ahead of the forward car. A stream of women and baby carriages began to cross the road. The sedan roared on. The women, many screaming, huddled helplessly with their priceless cargoes. Barely skirting the foremost of the human stream, the Buick, speed unchecked, whizzed past.

Harrison skidded the Chrysler far left, slowing unavoidably, then roared anew to the chase, up the hill, leaving the park behind. Once more about a half-mile to the front, the Buick swung out of view beyond the crest of the uphill road. Squeezing every atom out of the motor, the Chrysler sped up, and as they swept recklessly down the grade, Doctor Potter could see the Buick ahead on the wide road, zigzagging through the thick traffic headed for High Bridge.

Harrison swore in dismay as car after car in the onmoving line blocked their advance. Escape for the Buick would not be difficult once the bridge was reached, for beyond it lay numerous side roads.

A police car pulled alongside the Chrysler. Harrison flashed his badge at the angry bluecoat, and drove ahead, not waiting for recognition. Far ahead, the Buick presented a vivid if exasperating sight as it sped unobstructed up the white concrete incline of the bridge.

With a swift turn of his hands, Harrison sent his car far out of line, picking up speed, then shouted: "Look!"

The Buick had rocked off its straight course. It was swaying inexplicably from side to side, edging obliquely left. It followed that mad path up the incline—flush across the oncoming line of cars!

It cut incredibly between two cars; the next instant it met the rear of another, sideswiping the fender and caroming off into the curb of the bridge roadway. It bounced back, rearing like a mustang, then spun onward, banging noisily into the bridge rail, stopped dead.

When, a minute later, the Chrysler got to the site of the accident, Sanders was prostrate on the sidewalk, bleeding from glass cuts. Doctor Potter hastened to administer first aid. Fenner was sprawled on the curb, a feeble though conscious hulk.

Harrison, identifying himself to the gathered police, began to give orders concerning disposition of the Buick.

7

FEDERAL AGENT HARRISON scowled in response to Doctor Potter's greeting as they met inside the police garage the following morning. Doctor Potter understood Harrison's ill temper.

The tires of the wrecked Buick had been checked, analyzed, traced. Little doubt could now exist. The Buick's tires were *not* the tires that had left imprints in the vicinity of the Isham home. More, it seemed certain that those imprints had been left by tires not adapted to the Buick sedan's wheels.

"Tell me what you want, Doctor," Harrison grumbled. "And please omit crowing about your psychic beliefs."

Doctor Potter led the way somberly toward where a mechanic was working on the Buick. "I'm hardly in a mood to crow," he said.

Harrison scratched his head in amazement, stopping right behind the wrecked Buick.

The mechanic was goggled, working with a blow-torch. The doors of the

car were open, the two big seats on the garage floor; the hood of the engine was off, its interior empty; its trunk was completely dismantled.

"Is this what you wanted a mechanic for—to destroy it?" Harrison cried. Doctor Potter shook his head.

"The way everything was so vividly, even terribly corroborated——"

"I know only one thing," Harrison snapped. "The tire clue was a false lead. Fenner can laugh at me. He'll maybe get out of the extortion charge with a sharp lawyer."

"Yes—but why, if the tire clue was false, why was Fenner so desperately anxious to get back the car?"

"He must have learned I was after it——"

"But for what reason did he fear that? That's left unaccounted for—just as the one single sensation of Sanders is left unaccounted for. I mean, his constant feeling in the car, a sense of terrible, overwhelming loneliness, of smothering death, decay——"

"That's out of my interest, I told you, Doctor."

Doctor Potter went on undisturbed: "But if every mediumistic impression of Sanders has been vindicated by what I've seen, this one must be. It *must!*" The doctor trembled with his conviction, and Harrison shrugged pityingly.

At that the mechanic interrupted.

"Stripped," he said wearily to Doctor Potter. "Nothing out of the ordinary under the hood nor in the trunk, nor anywhere."

Doctor Potter stared disbelievingly. Like a drowning man snatching at a straw, the doctor pointed at the seats on the floor.

"Them too?" the mechanic laughed. He kicked at the heavy back seat. His laugh vanished. Mumbling, he lifted the seat, studying the underside, remarking at the unusual shortness of the springs. He seized the crowbar and began prying beneath the undercover. Doctor Potter and Harrison, intently watching the mechanic's silent but hurried operation, noticed that the man's tool met something unexpectedly firm, hard, right beneath the soft cover of the seat.

The mechanic grunted, manipulating, and with a creaking of wood and metal, his tool broke through the resisting substance. Sweating, he widened the quite unanticipated aperture within the seat. Harrison swore wildly. The mechanic, gasping faintly, fell back on his heels.

Out from the seat poured the indescribable dank stench that swirls from long unopened, airless pits of the dead. The gaping men tried to free their eyes from the interior of that crypt molded with fiendish ingenuity within the seat. Harrison was speaking suddenly:

"Fenner—he was desperate, clever as they come. He took no chances, never did, trusted nobody. He played this horrible game with as little risk of a death sentence as possible."

And as Doctor Potter heard himself saying, "I know it must be!" the mechanic threw a shaft of light flush upon the unspeakable spectacle: That which had been devilishly secreted within the seat—the moldering corpse of the kidnaped, murdered Isham infant.

"The man was outside the realm of this dream."

The Hunch

By GENE LYLE III

A brief tale about an uncanny premonition

JOHN McCASSEY refused to admit, even to himself, that he was running away from anything so intangible as a hunch. He had to have a rest from the strain of work. This was his entirely legitimate excuse. But it was a rationalization too, because McCassey would not have left merely for a rest.

West, where the sun set, where nothing ever happened, was where John McCassey wanted to go. As usual he was in a hurry, and he started out in an airliner.

but it got him no farther than Santa Fe. Landing at dusk at that ancient slumberous city, the flight was canceled due to the storm. So the agent got him a seat on the first train out, to which happened to be attached a special car bearing twenty or so congressmen on an inspection tour of naval equipment.

McCassey was a thin man, taut as a violin string, with sharp nose and restless eyes continually darting from one object to another. In the brightly lighted club car he tossed his dripping topcoat on the rack and plunked down beside a heavy-set fellow.

The warmth, the commotions of other passengers settling themselves, gave him a slight sense of peace. But deep within him the notion lingered that he was being fooled by it.

A hospital odor drew his attention to the man beside him. The fellow, dressed neatly in gray serge, was thick-lipped, broad-shouldered, middle-aged. He had stubby muscular hands and he might have been a prosperous farmer except that McCassey, thinking always in terms of headlines, detected a familiar crinkle about the eyes. McCassey recognized him as the most publicized surgeon in the land. He was gazing morosely out the rain-streaked window.

On an impulse McCassey introduced himself. "I'm managing editor of *The Chicago Call,*" he said. "How'd you dodge the reporters while that Brandt case is still on page one?"

The surgeon frowned. His thick lips quivered. "The little Brandt boy will pull through," he said. "It was quite simple—we merely relieved the pressure on his brain. I don't think he'll have epilepsy any more."

"But that's revolutionary, isn't it?" the editor insisted.

"Possibly. It's been thought of before. All it required was the development of a technique. Look here," he said abruptly. "I'll tell you why I'm leaving town. I'm—well," his voice became a hoarse whisper, "I'm taking my daughter home to her mother in San Diego."

It sounded like domestic trouble and McCassey said no more about it. Besides, he distinctly felt a tightening at his throat. He had been half expecting this symptom, dreading it.

"You don't believe in premonitions, do you?" he asked.

Something in his voice made the surgeon look curiously at him. "Plenty of historical evidence," the surgeon said. "Witches, soothsayers, that sort."

"I mean living people," said McCassey.

"Such cases are reported. I wouldn't bet on one though."

"No, of course not," said McCassey. "I wouldn't either. But here's something funny. Whenever there's a major news break, hours before it happens I get to feeling tense."

The surgeon ruminated a moment. "Events leading up to a news break—movement of troops to a border for instance—could make you expect it before it happens, don't you think?"

"It's not that," said McCassey. "I never have any idea what it's going to be or where it's going to happen. That's the devil of it. I've come to rely on these hunches in spite of myself. They've never failed me. But each time the strain leaves me as limp as a wet rag."

McCassey grew more agitated as the journey progressed. Other passengers shot glances at him. The surgeon wondered if there was another seat where he could be by himself, but seeing none gave it up.

"I had one of those hunches when I left Chicago this morning," McCassey went on. "I'm afraid that's the real reason I left. Thought I could get away from it. But I can't—it's been growing stronger."

THE harsh honk-honk of the engine whistle, sounding incongruously like an old-fashioned automobile horn, signaled for a crossing. Scattered lights of a mountain town flashed past outside, trees and frame buildings glistening in the rain. McCassey jerked back his sleeve and glanced at his watch.

"We're pulling into Albuquerque," he said breathlessly. "I'm going to send a wire."

He rang for the porter, demanded telegraph blanks, and when they came he frenziedly scribbled out a message. The surgeon watched the words appear:

HYLLIS GARDNER—CITY EDITOR THE CALL—CHICAGO—KEEP WIRES OPEN HOLD STAFF READY FOR EXTRA EDITION

That was all. McCassey's pencil ripped the yellow paper as he scratched his signature across the bottom.

"You'll have me believing it in a minute," the surgeon said.

Beads of sweat appeared on McCassey's thin forehead. "At times like this," he said, "something keeps driving me. I want to start organizing the story, getting the facts sifted, the leads written. But—but the story hasn't happened yet!"

The train eased into the station. McCassey hustled the porter off with his telegram. He fidgeted with his pencil during the few minutes halt. Then the train resumed its gentle vibration.

By now McCassey was powerless to fight off this sense of impending catastrophe. It had nothing to do with logic. It was maddeningly like a memory one tries to recall and can't. And like the memory of a thing that has happened, it was somehow irrevocable. It was the crashing drive of fate. He had to accept it as though it were fact and yet not completely fact either. Such thoughts have driven men crazy. Again he glanced at his watch.

"I sent that wire half an hour ago," he said aloud.

His voice startled the surgeon out of a deep revery. "Why, you're trembling like a leaf," the big man said.

"I've got to stop this train!" McCassey burst out. He started to rise, but the surgeon grasped his thin shoulder and eased him back.

"You need a sedative," the surgeon said. "You're on the verge of hysteria."

McCassey did not resist. Like a man in dread of the operating-table, he welcomed an anodyne to blank out his mind. The surgeon pulled down a grip and brought out a medicine-case. He brought a paper cup of water and handed McCassey a pill.

"Here," he said. "You'll feel better."

Greedily McCassey swallowed the pill.

The rhythm of the train pervaded McCassey as the drug touched and soothed his jagged nerves. The surgeon sighed, and slumped back in his chair as though exhausted. It struck McCassey as odd how phlegmatic this much-publicized man now seemed. For a short time McCassey remained aware of the imminence of disaster without much caring. And then even the awareness left him. A comfortable drowsiness crept over him.

He blinked, for he thought he saw a young woman bending over the back of his seat, talking to the surgeon. Possibly she was a deception of the eyes. He could not be sure. Still, he became aware of certain features. Lacking any make-up, with skin like ghostly blue marble, she had a sensuous, full-lipped beauty. Her voice came clear and bell-like. McCassey forced himself to concentration. He distinguished words.

"Daddy, daddy! Listen to me!" She seemed to be pleading. Strangely, the surgeon did not hear her. He was dozing, his head bowed over his thick chest. Yet the girl seemed frantic.

"Why don't you shake him?" McCassey asked.

Wildly, uncertainly, the girl looked about. She saw McCassey, and there was terror in her eyes. "I've tried," she said despairingly. "It doesn't do any good. But I've got to tell him something—I've got to! Maybe you——"

And then an odd realization came to McCassey. He was like a man in a dream who is restrained from doing certain ordinarily simple things. The surgeon was outside the realm of this dream.

"I guess I can't do it," McCassey said. "But wait—try this." He brought out his notebook and pencil and offered them to her. "Write down what you want."

She snatched the pencil and wrote frantically. "Oh, hurry—make him read this!"

As McCassey tore the sheet out of his notebook he saw what she had written.

"Stop the train," he read. "Bridge out. Alice."

He looked up, but the girl was not there. With a sudden chill the impending catastrophe flashed back to him. This was it, the thing the future had withheld! He tottered to his feet and ran stumblingly toward the vestibule. He found the emergency airbrake line and yanked it, hard.

Airbrakes screeched, couplings clashed. McCassey lurched to the floor. He felt the train shudder to a full stop. And then he wondered if he were mad, doing this thing. No longer did he have that feeling of imminent danger.

Excited passengers brushed past. McCassey pulled himself up, made his way through the vestibule and down the steps. People were running toward the engines, their feet grating in the wet gravel of the roadbed.

McCASSEY ran past the two locomotives, feeling the heat of their big driving-wheels. A crowd was gathering on the tracks in the headlights, not more than fifty feet ahead. He pushed his way through. He saw the approach to a trestle bridge. Twisted girders hung limp into the black chasm where the bridge had been. From far below came the rumble of torrential waters.

"There's the guy who stopped the train!" someone yelled. The voice sounded awed.

People crowded around McCassey. One man displayed a badge in his palm. He was a Secret Service man, and McCassey remembered the congressmen in their special car.

On the edge of the crowd McCassey saw the surgeon.

"It must have washed out only a few minutes ago," the Secret Service man said. "How'd you know?"

McCassey wiped the rain out of his eyebrows.

He called to the surgeon.

"Your daughter gave me a note," McCassey told the surgeon. "The note said the bridge was gone."

The big doctor stared at him, his thick lips gaping slightly. He seemed almost terrified. "What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"Her name was Alice," McCassey said. "Here——" he reached into his pocket, but his hand came out empty. "I must have lost that note," he said.

The blood had drained from the surgeon's face. It was gray.

"Alice was her name," he said. "Listen," he said, grasping McCassey's lapel, "she's—she's up in the baggage car!"

"Mictlana, where the sun sleeps."

King of the World's Edge

By H. WARNER MUNN

The odyssey of a strange voyage to America in King Arthur's time—
a fascinating story of heroic adventure and eery thrills—
an absorbing weird tale, crammed with action

The Story Thus Far

VENTIDIUS VARRO, the narrator, centurion under Arthur, Imperator of Britain, witnesses the downfall of Roman-British power beneath the Saxon heel after the recall of Rome's legions.

Following the death of Arthur, a few hardy patriots take the huge dromon, the Prydwen, and sail under the leadership of

Merlin, the enchanter, to find a new land in the west, already discovered by the earlier explorer, St. Brandon.

Varro hopes to found a new Rome, but Merlin seeks the terrestrial Paradise, the Land of the Dead, which most religions place in the west and which it has been prophesied that he shall find there.

Shipwrecked on the coast now known as North Carolina, they are taken prisoner by Tlapallicos, slave subjects of Tlapallan, a kingdom set up in the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys by an offshoot of the Mayan race, known to us as the Mound Builders.

They are taken to Fort Chipam, a short distance inland, held by partly civilized descendants of many savage tribes, united by the severe training to which they have been subjected from birth and a common dread of the unsubdued tribes which hold the Atlantic seaboard and the forests of the North.

Varro saves the life of Hayonwatha, commander of the garrison, and becomes his blood-brother. Merlin, to test the efficacy of Druid magic in this strange land, calls up a windstorm which wrecks the fort, and the Romans, anxious to make friends, mount guard to protect the walls while they are being rebuilt, although they could easily escape.

In appreciation, Hayonwatha grants them the privileges of guests, until the order arrives from the interior that they be brought to Tlapallan's capital, Nachan, the City of the Snake.

Here they face the cruel ruler of this cruel land, the priest-king Kukulcan, and are cast into a dungeon as food for the never satiated altars. With them are immured Hayonwatha and his men, for their friendliness to the explorers.

Daily, Tlapallicos are sacrificed, but the white men are reserved for the great sacrifice upon the shortest day of the year, when all fires are extinguished and relit by the rays of the sun.

Marcus, Varro's young nephew, loved by all, is horribly tortured to death. Merlin is bound to a post and three Roman archers commanded to display their skill upon him. Instead, they turn their bows upon the Kukulcan and the chief priests.

Following this confusion, the ceremonies are suspended until the next day, but in the night Merlin, using black magic, which he as a Christian dreads and uses only as a last resort, kills the guards and opens a way of escape from the city to the northern forests where dwell Hayonwatha's people.

As they enter the woods' edge, Merlin brings down a windstorm upon the sleeping City of the Snake, and Ventidius swears to raise a power that will sweep away the evil civilization of Tlapallan.

The story continues:

Part III

13. The Stonish Giants and the Flying Heads

ALL that day we pushed toward the north, through the forest, beneath a gray sky from which, toward evening, a light snow came sifting down. By this time we had left the large towns well behind us, though we could see smoke rising in many places, questioning and answering, as the word was passed along to the scattered villages and the lonely outposts, in hard-won clearings.

But these very messages defeated their own purpose, for the broken, puffing pillars of smoke showed us the position of our enemies, and Hayonwatha read the signals and told us of the almost total destruction of the City of the Snake, and of how we were thought to have gone down the river toward the south, many coracles having been found to be missing.

This mistake was the saving of us, for the forts along the northern frontier were

lax in their night watch, and we passed between them, so closely that we saw the dying embers of a signal fire, with no one near it, and slipped within the borders of the free Chichamecan wilderness, five and fifty fighting-men in single file, making no more noise than so many foxes. And few as we were, Myrdhinn was with us, a host in himself!

Toward morning, having marched twenty-four hours without food or sleep, with short pauses for rest, we began to feel that we should be far enough from danger so that we might stop and recuperate. But Hayonwatha led on as tireless as ever, and seeing that our aged seer did not demur, we were shamed and followed on, though all our muscles complained, having softened during our imprisonment.

Just at daybreak, we came out upon the shores of a small lake with a wooded island in it. Here, under instructions from our leader, we made rafts and piled upon them all our armor and gear.

These things we ferried over to the island, while Hayonwatha and his ten men returned into the forest and were gone a long time, wiping out our tracks. Then they made false tracks and returned on the opposite shore, blotting out their latest marks before they entered the icy waters and rejoined us, half dead from the cold.

Nor could we make any fire till after dark, and then only the merest spark among a nest of boulders where every ray of light was deadened; and this of certain woods carefully chosen which gave no smoke that might carry an odor to the shore. So, without supping, we slept, and in the morning found that any traces we might have left were now securely hidden, for snow lay deep upon our brush shelters and continued falling all that day.

This was followed by severely cold weather in which the lake froze over, except upon one side of the island for a space of about twenty feet where an underwater current rushed black and bubbling to the surface. Here the fishing was very good. There were also hares in the groves and fat, warmly feathered birds which could be easily captured after they had roosted for the night.

Yet, food for all of us was not to be had in sufficient quantity, and had it not been for the fortunate coming of a noble stag, with all his retinue, to our retreat (having been pursued by wolves across the ice from the mainland), we should have been forced to seek elsewhere for our living and this might have been our deaths.

Twice we saw antlered Tlapallico scouts, and once a raiding party going southward with scalps and Chichamecan prisoners.

BEFORE our meat was quite gone, Myrdhinn and Hayonwatha came to a decision and we moved onward into Chichameca, crossing the deep snows by means of flat, oval boats fastened one upon each foot whereby we did not sink into the drifts, these being made of interwoven withes and thongs and very light, though hard to learn the practise and use, and the cause of much cursing and sore muscles.

At this period of the winter season, the northern peoples seldom engage in any great amount of warfare, owing to the difficulties of travel; so it seemed our best time for making a peaceful contact.

We met a small party of Tlapallicos and shot them down from among the trees while they lay in camp. We lost none and released several prisoners, all women, who fell upon their dead captors with reviling and would have mutilated the bodies had we not interfered, although Myrdhinn ordered the heads to be cut off and brought with us.

This was a lucky meeting, for these women were of the People of the Hills, Hayonwatha's tribe, and some remembered his mother, Thiohero; so they willingly

guided us to their people and saved us two days journey. We made friends, became temporarily a part of the tribe and wintered there in stout log houses, the village enclosed by a stout palisade though not as well as others in Tlapallan.

We gave daily instructions in the use of the bow, and these tall forest men became good archers, which improved their hunting and their chances of survival in the grim fight for life against Nature and the many enemies which surrounded and beset them continually.

As winter wore into spring (though you must not think that this was all our life and we had little to do), Myrdhinn became more exclusive and harder to see.

He had smoked and preserved the Tlapallican heads; now at nights he studied the stars, and daily he busied himself in a house reserved for his private use, from which came many evil smells and sometimes colored lights and heavy choking smokes.

Often he held talks with Hayonwatha and the head men of the tribe, learning their legends, superstitions and fears; planning his plans.

We became deeply attached to these People of the Hills and found them reverent of us at first, then companionable and jolly when we knew them better, though we had yet to learn of their natural ferocity in battle.

We thought, one day in early spring, that time had come. The men began painting themselves for war, the young boys and youths emulating their elders, and kings sent word from the other settlements to this Onondaga village, that the nation was to make ready.

But Myrdhinn interfered with this plan, and after a long conclave to which he alone of our company was admitted, a short time elapsed and a party set out, well armed, but not painted for war, toward the nearest community of traditional enemies.

I, with ten armored Romans, was among them.

After days of travel, we approached with great caution the largest village of the Possessors of the Flint. When far enough away to be sure that our activities would not be observed, we stripped the bark from a large birch and made a speaking-trumpet longer than a man. Then, in the dusk we came to a spot near the edge of the clearing where this village lay. We set up the trumpet on a tripod, and waited for complete darkness.

WHEN we could no longer see into the clearing, two of the swiftest young men seized four of the preserved Tlapallican heads by their long hair and made swiftly toward the village. Here they hurled the heads, each grinning most ghastly because of their shrunken lips, over the palisade and ran back to us very quietly.

This caused a faint buzz which was rising to a hubbub, when our trumpet bellowed in the night.

"Ganeagaono!" Hayonwatha's voice rumbled like an inhuman monster.

"Possessors of the Flint! I am a Stone Giant! Harken to my council! Long have I slumbered in the hills until my people should need me. I am your friend!

"The Flying Heads are gathering in the forests and the mountains to devour the once mighty nation of the Onguys. Tharon and the Sender of Dreams bade me rise and scatter them like crows from your cornfields. They are too many for me alone!

"Ganeagaono! Continue to listen. I rose among their chattering council. They fled after breaking their teeth upon my limbs of stone! They are meeting to eat you up, one little nation at a time, for there is no longer a powerful people to fight them away.

"Possessors of the Flint! Harken! Look

upon the Flying Heads I struck down as they came to spy upon your weakness and to listen on your rooftops as you plan to kill your brothers! Send your runners with peace belts to the People of the Hills, at earliest dawn. Set a date for a peace council. I go to warn the other nations. You will meet them all at Onondaga!"

The thunderous grumbling stopped. Myrdhinn gave me a long tube and held a coal of fire to its upper end. Immediately sparks cascaded from it like a fountain. I strode out into the open, and a moan of terror, like wind among bare branches, swept that crowded palisade, and a ball of red fire shot from the tube, high into the air, coloring me the hue of blood.

Strong men groaned in awe. I was dressed in full armor, and being well over six feet, must have appeared in that uncertain light far beyond natural stature.

I stood there a moment in a shower of sparks. Then I gave them the full Roman salute, turned as the tube spat out a clot of green flame, and in that ghastly light re-entered the forest.

The fire-tube at once was extinguished.

Myrdhinn hugged me in his joy. "Fine! Fine!" he muttered. "Listen to that roar of utter terror! Now if the others are only as successful."

Hayonwatha was already snapping orders, and guided by him, we made our way back to our forest town.

Other expeditions came straggling in. All had proven successful. The other four nations were in panic, and by daylight, runners came in from those we had warned. A little later came emissaries from the Great Hill People, and later still came messengers from the Granite People and the People of the Mucky Lands, while the Onondagas, well schooled in their lessons, met these panting peace-bringers with well-simulated terror of a night visitation which they pretended to have experienced themselves.

Back went the runners with a date for a conclave, and less than a week later all met at a lake which all desired, but which had been a battleground ever since the breaking up of the Onguy nation.

And there they were met together, a great multitude, their smokes studding all the hills around the lake, met in mutual fear of an imaginary enemy although their one real and dangerous foe had not been enough to cause them to combine.

From concealment, we Romans in full armor marched forth, with Myrdhinn at the head in his ceremonial robes, his sea-found headdress trailing long green feathers far down his back.

Now, at this sight a murmur of dismay ran through the host confronting us. Yet we could see that though they were afraid (for at first sight we must have appeared like true sons of those rocky hills) at the clank of our armor, they quickly recovered their natural dignity and stoicism, for they are a people who take great pride in preserving their composure, even under great bodily suffering.

Already they had so commanded their features, that no look, even of surprise, betokened that our coming was a thing beyond their experience. But nervous clutchings of hatched handles and knife-hafts, and gloomy stares, showed us plainly that their interest was precarious and the beautiful glen of Thendara might once more become a battlefield.

WE APPROACHED the assembled Onondaga nation. Fifty paces away, we halted. Myrdhinn advanced and Hayonwatha came forward to meet him, bearing a long, feather-decorated pipe, lit and smoking.

They went through a ceremonious ritual, during which we felt that those piercing eyes focussed upon us were rapidly learning that we were far more human than we had at first seemed.

We all became uneasy. At length, Myrdhinn spoke loudly:

"Men of the Onguys, order your women to put out your campfires!"

They eyed him in wonderment and he repeated his command.

"At once. To the last ember!"

Through the host, the striplings sped to the lake shore, to the hills. The many plumes of smoke thinned and vanished.

"As you, on earth, blot out the many scattered fires that mark each seperate family of the once powerful Onguys, I, Tarenyawagon, blot out the Great Flame. Behold!"

He gestured toward the sky and a running sound of woe swept the throng. A black shadow was impinging upon the edge of the sun!

Before their fear could turn toward thoughts of saving the sun by killing us, Myrdhinn raised his voice.

"Men of the Onguy Nation! I see before me many men. They look at one another in hatred and suspicion, yet they are brothers. They are of the same color, they speak the same language; among them are the same clans, the same societies; they like similar foods, they play similar games —they are brothers.

"My sons: should brothers kill one another while the roof above their heads is burning from the sparks of an enemy torch? Should brothers fight among themselves when their father, their mother, their little children are being led into captivity, or already suffer under the whip of their merciless captors?

"Continue to listen, my sons:

"You have an enemy at the door of every lodge; more treacherous than the tree-cat, more savage than the bear, more to be dreaded than the hungry wolf pack. One man is helpless; one clan may strike and run, but if all the brothers hold together, they may drive the enemy from their doors!"

All the sun was now darkened but a tiny edge, yet no one murmured or slipped away.

"People of the Granite, of the Great Hills, of the Mucky Lands! Look about you! Possessors of the Flint, regard! Your enemies are not the Flying Heads, nor are they men gathered here! Beside each of you stands a brother to fight for you, to guard your back in battle. He will help and protect you, if you will do the same for him. Throw down your old black thoughts and let them mingle with the blackness that shrouds us now."

For all the sun was completely blackened!

"Let one darkness blot out the other. Clasp your neighbor by the hand and let me hear you call him brother!"

That was an anxious moment. Myrdhinn had only short moments to complete his long-considered plan and it seemed that it was bound to fail, as that assemblage stood peering at one another. Everything must be over before the light reappeared or the people would realize the event to be only a natural phenomenon of the skies.

At length an old feeble king of the Nundawaono tottered toward the equally ancient king of the Onondagaono and took his hand.

A great shout went up and the ferment of fellowship began to spread through the gathering. Hayonwatha's shell trumpet cut through the uproar and Myrdhinn spoke again.

"My children: Do not forget your present emotions. There will come to your minds grievances, old sores not yet healed by time, new differences of opinion. Pass over them or let them be settled by your councillors. You have one great enemy—Tlapallan!"

A mighty roar of fury interrupted him. Pale and anxious, counting the remaining seconds, he waited for order.

"Continue to listen, my sons: Revere

the aged, abandon them no longer to the beasts of the forest. Consider them to be your charges, even as your infants. Are you not better than the Mias, who regard an aged person as merely a body to be mutilated for the glory of a bloody god?

"Be kind among yourselves, merciless to your one enemy. So shall you find peace and become great. Thus you shall form a league in which you will know power, and in so doing you unite in planting a four-rooted tree which branches severally to the north, south, east and west. Beneath its shade you must sit in friendship, if it is not to be felled by your foes.

"Beneath it also you must erect a mystical Long House in this glen, in which you all may dwell, and over it will stand the mighty tree of the League as your symbol and your sentinel for ever!

"I give you new fire for your hearthstone."

He rapped the coal from the ceremonial pipe upon the ground. It sizzled, a running serpent of fire darted along the ground, a cloud of white smoke rose, there came a noise like a thunderclap, and a few feet away from the center of the cleared space in which seer and trumpeter stood, a bright red blaze sprang up out of the ground.

And at that exact instant the bright edge of the sun reappeared!

"Light torches, return to your weikwaums and know this spot henceforth as the Place of the Council Fire. Be Onguys no more, but call yourselves Hodenosaunee, People of the Long House.

"I have spoken!"

HE RETURNED to our company, and in perfect unison we retired to quarters previously arranged for us by the friendly Onondagas, while as we went we saw the throng pressing forward to secure the magic fire, clutching brands, strips of clothing, or reeds.

Now, you must not think this speech changed in a day all the harsh feelings of many years.

It was, however, the beginning of a long council and there was wrangling and bitter words, but before these bickerings could develop into real trouble, Myrdhinn would thrust himself into the talk and suddenly argumentation was over before the participants rightly knew how difficulties had so suddenly become simple.

The council lasted four days. Myrdhinn was formally adopted into the Nation of the Flint and given important office in its councils. Hayonwatha also was given the rank of Royanch, or councillor, and had I wished, I could have also been honored.

But I wanted none of this barbaric adulation, and indeed, Myrdhinn received it unwillingly, fearing it would hinder his own plans for the spring traveling. For he was very anxious to be away toward the southwest, in search of the Land of the Dead.

Eventually the council broke up, with the result desired by all. Five nations, each feeble by itself against the overwhelming might of Tlapallan, had now combined into a great forest power.

The lusty young giant stretched its muscles and desired war to test its strength, but its brains (fifty Royanehs elected by the people) bade it wait and bide its time and grow stronger.

So, during the spring, the People of the Long House learned the use of the bow and became proficient and dangerous. And in the last days of that season we determined upon a raid upon the Miner's Road and possibly an attack on the frontier of Tlapallan.

14. The Mantle of Arthur

NOW this so-called Miner's Road was not really a road at all, being (from the habit of these people in walking single

file through the thick forests) at no place along it more than a foot in width and narrowing very often to become no wider than a few inches. Its depth also varied, depending on whether or not it passed over rocky ground or soft soil. Yet its whole length was well marked, well patrolled, and studded with forts; for this hard-beaten path connected the four central cities, before mentioned, with the rich copper mines near the Inland Sea, and along it, during the summer months, passed a stream of heavily laden slaves.

To us, this seemed like a long arm of hated Tlapallan thrust deep into the treasure chests of Chichameca, and we resolved to break that arm, and if possible, to stop this systematic looting.

So a war party marched: myself, Hayonwatha, twenty Romans, eighty Hodenosaunee, all conscious that upon us rested the duty of proving to Tlapallan that a power had risen in the north. Myrdhinn, with the rest of the Romans and two hundred of the People of the Long House, marched to seize the mines, while other detachments separating, headed, in strength commensurate with the size of the fort they were to attack, for each of the holdings along the Miner's Road.

My party had orders to intercept and cut off, below the last fortification, any party which might slip through the line of communication with news for Tlapallan. We were to kill or take prisoner any small party of troops coming to the aid of the forts, should Tlapallan be warned. We hoped that by night attacks, all forts might be taken before smoke signals could spread the news, for our strength was great, the woods full of our warriors.

As a mark of favor, before I left, Mrydhinn called me aside and pressed a small package upon me. I opened it and thought he was joking, for the little box inside was empty.

He laughed. "Feel within."

I did so and was surprised to feel the fine texture of fabric, in which as my fingers quested, they seemed to become lost and my eyes blurred as I looked at my hand. Nor could I see the bottom of the box, which puzzled me, it also being blurred and wavering.

"That," said Myrdhinn, "is a priceless relic—the Mantle of Arthur."

Then I understood. We all had heard of the robe which rendered anything beneath it invisible, but I had not thought until then that it might be in our possession.

"Myrdhinn! You have brought——?"

He nodded. "Aye. The thirteen precious things were in my great chest. Would you have had me leave them for the Saxons?"

I smiled. "I suppose this is not magic?"

"What is magic?" he said impatiently. "Only something which the uninitiate does not understand. There is nothing evil about it. You need have no fears. You will not be blasted. 'Tis but a simple linen robe covered with black paint."

"Black paint? Nay, seer, you jest. There is nothing black about it. It is without color."

"Precisely. Without color, because it has robbed the light which falls upon it of all color, and in doing so the various colors contained within light have canceled one another out, leaving nothing. Thus, it follows that one can no more see the robe or what it covers than one can see light itself as it passes through the air; for light and the colors which compose light are absent, being fully absorbed by this absolutely perfect black."

I could not have shown much comprehension, for he muttered:

"Why waste words? You are a man of war. I am a man of thought. We have nothing in common. Be off therefore to your killing."

So with that for farewell, I took the soft cloth which I could not see or understand,

stuffed it under my lorica and marched away.

NOW, for three days we lay in the hills overlooking the Miner's Road, at our appointed place, and nothing larger than tree-mice did we see, and our duty began to pall upon us all and grow very irksome. On the fourth morning, it seemed to me that further inaction could not be borne, for beyond the hills southward we could see the smoke arising from the City of the Snake and we yearned to strike some blow that would hurt and harm.

I lay thinking. What could a company so few as we do against such a multitude? Too, we must not disobey the orders of Myrdhinn and the Royanehs. The Miner's Road must not be left unwatched.

Then I remembered the Mantle, where it nestled warm beneath my lorica, and suddenly a plan, grand and dazzling, came to me.

If we were to attack Tlapallan we needed strange and powerful arms, which would terrify our enemy with their might. In the pits beneath the Egg lay the things we needed to create those arms. The clamps of the arrow-engines and the tormentæ! The bronze clamps we could not make, owing to the death of our smith and the lack of tin. (For even yet, we have found no tin in this land.)

But I, under the Mantle of Arthur, could enter the gates, and steal those clamps out of the pits, unseen and safely too!

So, with five Hodenosaunee, I left the ten Romans in charge, and we six went over the southern hills. At the edge of the forest nearest the city, my followers hid themselves while I donned the Mantle. The sight of their erstwhile stern and impassive faces as they saw me fade from sight was worth remembering. I thought they would turn and flee when they heard me speak from empty air, but though they wavered as they would not before enemy acts or lance, they held firm and I left them there to think on the god-like mysteries of white men and their ways.

After nearly an hour's brisk walk, I passed by the outworks and entered through the open gates, though I was obliged to wait a little time, for there was a coming and going of many people, as the fields were being put in order for the planting season.

Secure in my invisibility I strolled among the buildings, many of which were newly built, showing the damage done on the night of our escape. I spied out the strength of the city, and while I was amusing myself by calculating the thousands of people which it contained and mentally marking the weakest spots in the palisade which spined the back of the Woman-Snake, an accident imperiled the success of my adventure and nearly cost me my life.

Around the corner of a building ran a little naked reddish boy, his face all one large grin at some prank he had just played on some pursuing comrades. Head down, he hurled himself into my middle, all unseen as I was to him, and we both went rolling.

My robe flew up above my knees, my hood came off my head and had he not been well-nigh stunned by the impact, I must needs have killed the child or have all my trouble go for nothing.

I had barely time to scramble to my feet, adjust my robe and hood, and stand out of the way when a shouting pack of boys came and fell upon their fellow and bore him away, dizzy and sick.

After this I had no more inclination to roam aimlessly, but made for the Egg, found the entrance to the pits unguarded and soon came out again with three of the heavy clamps beneath my robe, which were as much as I could handily carry.

When I arrived among my followers, I was hungry and ate a cup full of teocentli

meal stirred into cold water, which is all we carry for rations when on a journey, it being light and very nourishing, and it would be a valuable addition to the army commissariat.

Then I returned and made two more trips with clamps and on the third trip brought the last of them and some tin from the Prydwen's sheathing.

It was now darkening and I knew I could not make another journey before nightfall, but wished to bring more tin while my luck still was good. The tin was worth more than gold to us, if we could discover in what proportions and in what manner we were to use it with the great supplies of copper which Myrdhinn and his men must have taken in their assault on the mines. So I tempted Fortune, and found I could not depend upon her fickle smile, as you shall see.

Returning, I had entered the crypt in almost absolute darkness and was feeling about for the pile of sheet tin which I knew was there, when suddenly I felt myself seized by unseen hands. I surged away, heard a ripping and suddenly I was free, but with the Mantle of Arthur stripped from me, without even a knife to protect myself against the armed men who crowded the place.

Luckily I was near the entrance. I dashed out, knocked over two men with torches who were hurrying to shut the corridor gate, and was loose in the city, with the people aroused and hunting me, every gate watched and with nothing open to me for a hiding-place.

At first I made for the river. Its high bank was lined with torch-bearers, so thickly gathered that an ant could not have slipped through. I headed back to climb the palisade.

Sneaking in the shadows, I came to a large unlighted house of logs, toward the center of the city. Behind me were a number of people, though not intentionally, for I knew I had not been seen. Another group was coming toward me, a short distance away.

What was I to do? Another moment and I should be within one of the two circles of light, or be seen by either group against the flares of the other as I tried to escape from between them.

I could not burrow into the ground or fly into the air. Then, as I looked up, an owl quitted the roof with a screech, dazzled by the many torches, and sailed into the forest. The owl has been a bird of evil omen to many, but I will for ever bless that one!

The hint it had given me was enough. In an instant I had climbed up the chinks in the log wall, with toe-tips and finger-tips, and was comfortably ensconced upon the roof by the time the two groups met, conferred and went upon their separate ways.

FOR the moment I was safe, but my situation was most precarious. At best I could remain there only until daylight, and there were no indications that this relentless search would die down by then.

I was thinking what would be best to do, when a man came out of the house beneath me and walked unsurely toward a bench, groping about beneath it, till he came upon a jug of water, from which he drank avidly as though parched with thirst.

Again he groped, his hands before him, back toward the entrance. This was strange in itself, for there was light enough from the stars and distant torches for me to see his face, so that he should be well able to see where he was going. Then I saw with surprise that he was walking with his eyes closed. The man was blind!

Perhaps, anywhere in the rest of the world, this would not have been peculiar. Even in Chichameca, there were people who were blind, deaf or dumb. But here in Tlapallan he was a freak, for Tlapallan

had no use for, or mercy upon, anyone who was handicapped by any affliction. Even among the ruling class of the Mias, an individual with an incurable disease was marked for death upon the altar of the Egg, whose priests had never enough sacrifices stored below in the pits to satisfy Ciacoatl, called the Devourer.

You can imagine what chance this blind man, a Tlapallico of the third removed from his original slave parents as his garments proclaimed him, would have if his blindness were known to the priests, whose pits were completely empty just now.

"Anywhere that is safe for you is safe for me, my friend!" I muttered to myself, as I swung off the roof edge and dropped beside him. He whirled with a little cry. I clapped my hand over his mouth and shoved him inside out of the light.

"Old man," I said, fiercely, "your people are hunting me. If they find me here they will take you too and we shall both be skinned alive on the altar. Do you understand my words?"

He nodded with vigor.

"Then hide me wherever you are yourself hiding. Quickly!"

He led me to an opening in the floor and went down a short ladder. I followed, snatching a stone hatchet from the wall. My life was in his hands, but he was equally at my mercy and I was younger and stronger than he. As I reached the dirt floor, he ran up the ladder like a youth, and I was about to hurl the hatchet, when he pulled a trap-door into place and by pulling a cord drew a bearskin across the floor above.

And then we sat in the dark together and became acquainted.

He had not always been blind. In his youth he had been a trader, until captured by Chichamecans and tortured by being forced to run betwen two long rows of barbarians armed with switches of thorn.

He had escaped, leaped into a river and floated to safety with his head hidden in a clump of floating weed, though grievously hurt. From a stroke of thornbush across the eyes or poison in the river water, his sight later began to fail, and he stayed within the city with his family, his wife and their one son, likewise married.

His family dug this refuge beneath their dwelling and here for five years he had lived, quite blind, in constant dread of discovery, going outside only upon the darkest of nights to taste the fresh air, when no one he met could go about easier than himself.

Tonight, being left alone, the women helping in the search for me, his thirst had tormented him into going after water.

As we talked, I learned that he had little love for Tlapallan and had enjoyed the free life of a forest trader; so I made him the proposition that he should help me to escape and I in turn would secure him a safe home among the Hodenosaunee, whose population was growing through their practise of raiding lesser tribes, taking captives and adopting them into their own nation, with full rights of citizenship.

It appealed to him, and later it appealed to the women of his family, and two days later, his son, returning from a forest expedition, bringing furs, elk-teeth and shell beads, likewise favored the plan. He had heard talk of a growing power in the north and was clever enough to see that an ambitious man might help himself mightily if allied to a nation whose sun was rising.

THE following morning was set for another trading-expedition, and with it this whole family planned to go, the blind man and I to be robed as women who were passing through the gates to walk a little way with their men before bidding them farewell.

This was the seventh day since the raid on the Miner's Road had begun. No copper had come into the city and there was

much talk and alarm because of this. Therefore a punitive expedition was being planned, and hearing of this I was filled with fear lest trading-parties should be forbidden the forest. I changed the plans to that night, and about the third hour after sunset, the young trader gathered his slaves (who were totally ignorant of our identity), and the blind man, his wife, myself and the son's wife, all four of us closely muffled, approached the small gate at the Snake's tail.

We might have known that there was little hope of success, when both the city within and the forest without crept with suspicion, when a spy had been known to enter the city, steal valuables and escape safely, when no copper or messenger from any of twenty forts along the Miner's Road had been seen or heard from for a week.

We should have realized that a muffled person would be obviously marked for inspection, but we did not, until as we were passing out through a triple guard, the blanket was twitched from the head of the young wife at the same time as my own. My height, I suppose, gave us away, but the cry of the guard told us all was lost.

He swung at my head. I dodged, and my own hatchet split his skull.

Then we were all running, we five, through the stupid slaves who were screaming beneath the knives and clubs of the guards, without the least knowledge of why they were being killed.

We would certainly have been cut down had it not been for the heroism of the old blind man, who, after we had passed unscratched through the gate, stopped and turned back, standing deliberately in the way before five guards who were pursuing us with leveled spears and coming with great bounds. His body barred the gate, and he fell there, dragging with him those fearfully barbed spears which could not be withdrawn, but must be cut away.

And in that moment of horror the whole sky burst into livid green and bloody scarlet! The women shrieked and dragged at the hands of myself and the young trader. We looked back. Above our heads drove a whistling arrow flight into the fighting mass at the gateway. All the world seemed alternately fire and night. We staggered like pallid corpses in the bloody rain of Judgment Day, and then ran on, they obeying my sharp commands, straight on into the darkness from whence the fire-tubes hissed and spat. Myrdhinn had come!

SOME two hundred yards from the gateway we met a host of archers, kneeling and firing, by order, flights of arrows which soared over the palisade into the city, barring any egress from the gate. Myrdhinn strode forward from among them and took my hand.

"I have lost the priceless Mantle," I said, ruefully. "I am ashamed. I have acted like a child."

Myrdhinn clapped me on the back. He seemed in the best of spirits.

"Think no more of it," he said, jovially. "You have given me something far more valuable. I was the child that I did not insist that we should bring the clamps and the tin on the night of our escape. I should have foreseen their value, but that night they seemed no more than so much metal, and a hindrance to our progress.

"My friend, we have them now to design others by! We have the tin for bronze-making, we have the mines in which we can obtain the copper, and in seven days of fighting, Chichameca has taken twenty strong forts of Tlapallan and the Tlapallicos within are either good reliable Hodenosaunee or are dead meat.

"If necessary, we will go to the coast, make a ship, sail to the wreck of the Prydwen and get enough tin to outfit with bronze clamps enough tormentæ to build a fence around Tlapallan.

"These folk are fighting-men. We can do anything now. Anything!"

He beamed upon his archers, like a hoary patriarch among his many sons.

"Very well, for the future," I said. "But let us look to the present. Shortly the Mias will be sallying out at another gate. They will cut off our retreat."

"Not so. Hayonwatha holds the gate at the Egg. The outworks are his. The other gate is held by ten companies."

"But we are not strong enough to take the city! They number thousands. The outlying villages will be surrounding us with men, if we do not make haste. We are deep within Tlapallan. For a real conquest, the small villages must first be taken and destroyed, their people driven into the main cities or cut up and absorbed into our armies. They are filled with slaves, who fight now for the Mias, but who would gladly fight for us if they had a chance of winning. We have here one city. If we take it too soon, we lose everything. The other three cities of Colhuacan, Miapan and Tlacopan will march upon us and swamp us with men! Where are our engines? Where can we find reinforcements?

"Chichameca is not united, but divided into hundreds of tribes who hate the Hodenosaunee as much as they hate Tlapallan. They must be with us also.

"Remember the extent of this Empire, the greatness of their holdings, their thousands of temples, their many forts, the myriads of men who march at the command of the Mias! Be satisfied, Myrdhinn, with what you have accomplished.

"We are a little people. Let us become great before we seek our just vengeance!"

"You are a man of war, Ventidius. Your thoughts are wise. Trumpeter, call in the men!"

Harsh and loud the shell trumpet brayed across the frantic city. Far beneath the other darting fire-balls which marked the attacking-points, other trumpets answered. The din lessened, the fire-balls ceased their dropping, though burning huts still reddened the sky, and Chichameca started home like a glutted bear, leaving Tlapallan to lick her wounds and mourn her lost copper mines.

Only once on the long trip back did Myrdhinn and I hold any conversation. During it, I said curiously:

"Of course, I realize that the five men of my company, who were guarding the clamps, sent word back to their post, and I understand that their messenger met your men that were sweeping down from the upper forts, so that uniting, all the companies came down on the city. But how did you know I meant to escape tonight, and how did you know at which gate I would be and at what time?"

Myrdhinn chuckled. "I knew."

"But how? How?"

A soft swishing passed overhead. I looked up and saw great yellow eyes peering down upon me.

"Maybe the owl told me. Owls have a reputation for omniscience, haven't they?"

And that was all I was ever able to learn. Myrdhinn always loved a mystery.

15. We Seek the Land of the Dead

SO WE let time work for us, and constantly messengers ran the woods, carrying beaded belts cabalistically embellished, each bead and little figure with its own important meaning, the only real language these many various tribes of Chichameca have in common.

One by one, the tribes agreed to pacts binding them to strike when we struck, to wait until we were ready, and the League that should one day strike Tlapallan to the heart grew stronger and more dangerous.

The summer came and went, and Myrdhinn, I knew, was fretting to be off on his

will-o'-the-wisp hunt for the Land of the Dead.

Days grew colder, a tang came into the air. Everything was peaceful and happy. Nothing happened to disturb us. There had been no effort to capture any of the lost forts we held, nor had any expeditions been sent out to obtain copper or to punish Chichameca.

Then, one day, Myrdhinn's youthful heart got the better of him and he rebelled openly against the monotony of life.

He *was* going in search of the Land of the Dead! He *would* solve the eternal mystery of Death! He would call for volunteers among the men. Those who had not taken native wives would surely come. As for him, he was going *now!* And he did.

Out of thirty-seven Romans (thirteen had been killed during the various assaults upon the mines, the forts, and the City of the Snake), twenty-one marched with Myrdhinn in search for new adventure. The number would have been even had I not made it odd. The rest had married among the Hodenosaunee, and were valuable where they were, to further the work of the League.

You can follow our route on the map, and you must not think that because I dwell not on the journey itself, that it was a little thing. We covered enormous distances that winter. We even went beyond the grasp of winter itself and found green grass and flowers when the season called for snow, but that is in advance of the tale. First, to march southwest, we were forced to take coracles and paddle north! We crossed a broad arm of the Inland Sea.

We climbed mountains, we forded rivers, we hunted and fished. We left mountains far behind us and came to broad moorlands, veritable countries in themselves, peopled only by tremendous herds of wild, humpbacked cattle, which might take a day or more to pass a single point. The sound of their trampling hoofs makes the air quiver and the ground tremble. Before them is grass, growing often taller than a man; behind them nothing but hard-beaten earth. Everything green and soft has been stamped into the ground!

Their flesh is good.

These vast moorlands, greater in extent than Britain, we christened the Sea of Grass and journeyed on, led by Myrdhinn's little iron fish, floated occasionally in a cup of water.

Now and then we met people, dirtier, less courageous, more dispirited than our sturdy allies we had left. Small wonder, for these lands were the original highway of the Mias when they came north from the Hot Lands, and during their long wanderings the Mias had nearly depopulated the whole grass country. Only scattered individuals had been overlooked, who had since coalesced into families and groups, and were trying the hard business of becoming tribes and nations again. The ambition seemed hopeless, for they told us the moorlands were often raided.

But to the southwest (Myrdhinn started) they told us, was a nation which had never been defeated. Attacked in their lake country of Aztlan, beyond us to the north, by a vastly superior force of Mias, they had refused to become Tlapallicos, had beaten off their attackers and quitted their beloved country to go south.

What had become of them? No one knew, but raiding parties of Tlapallan had gone after them and had returned, fewer in numbers and seeming discouraged. Some parties had never returned.

Could we go westward? Certainly not! There lay mountains, high, unclimbable, where no man might go and breathe. Beyond them the sun went to sleep each night. There he would one day go to die.

And there, if there is a Land of the Dead, it must surely lie, for we have

searched everywhere else that we can and have not found it.

We went within sight of the mountain foothills and turned south, thinking that we might come to an end of the immense range and go around it. Possibly there is such a route, where one may stand upon Earth's Brink, and look over the edge, but we were turned aside.

WE CAME to a land of sand, heat, no rain, few springs, filled with thorny, leafless trees, bulbous and strange. We saw reptiles, by one of which a comrade was bitten and died in great pain. We fought out of it, almost dead for want of water, decided we could not cross it and turned eastward to go around it, afterward returning south.

Then we arrived in a forbidding land of rocks and great gullies, eaten deeper than one can see into the bowels of the earth by rivers which flow so far below the observer that although he can see the glint of sunlight upon a wave if the time of day be right, he can hear nothing of the tumult which rages below.

A strange land, this land of Alata. In it are many marvels.

Yet even here in the scrap heap of all the world, the black threat of Tlapallan lay like a curse over the doughty folk who had the hardihood to carve out homes in the very rocks.

For some time we had been following signs that told us of a large company of men ahead and had thrown out scouts to protect us from a surprise.

Now, one in advance hurried back with the word that far ahead he had heard sounds of strife; so with bows strung and ready, we pushed cautiously on, following along the bottom of a deep, dry gully.

Before we expected to discover anything, we heard war-cries and around a bend in the gorge saw a fierce conflict at some distance.

We beheld, carefully concealed as we were, an encampment of Tlapallicos at the dead end of the way, and high above was an odd fortress-home—a great house set in a deep recess of the almost perpendicular cliff. Smoke was curling from its jagged rooftop from many kitchens within its more than two hundred rooms. Its terraced parapets were dark with people, shouting and brandishing spears.

Above them, an outthrust of the upper tableland overhung like a broad lip of stone, shielding them from any boulders, though the Tlapallicos had made this protection a menace, for now it held back vast volumes of choking smoke, from fires of green wood and wet leaves below, which the wind blew directly into the hollow.

Through this choking cloud, massive stones were plunging down from battlements and towers and the Tlapallicos climbing the cliff were having trouble. The besieged had drawn up the ladders connecting sections of the path, leaving scarcely a handhold between.

Indeed, some of these intervening segments had been previously polished to a glassy smoothness by those who constantly stayed at home — the cripples, oldsters, children and women.

Furthermore, the warriors stoutly contested the way, hurling spears and double-headed darts, while their women poured down boiling water, sand, ashes and hot embers to torment their enemy.

Yet, far to one side, untouched and hidden by smoke from those above, a line of Tlapallicos was creeping up from cranny to cranny, connecting various shelves and footholds with ladders, the whole string of them glittering, with their accouterments of mica and burnished copper, until it seemed that the symbolical Snake of Tlapallan had come alive and was slithering up the cliff wall to engorge these hapless dwellers. And we could see that if matters continued as they were, fight as sturd-

ily as they might, the end could be only slavery and death for the cliff folk.

Secure, for the moment, in our concealment we held conclave and decided to interrupt, for as Myrdhinn stated, "We could not live by ourselves forever, but must find friends or make them, in this inhospitable land, and whom better could we trust than implacable enemies of our own foes?"

Then, we all agreeing, I cried, "Let us prove, first, that we are friendly!"

And we stood up among the encircling boulders, in which we had lain like chicks in a nest, and our long bows twanged.

As though this had been a signal, the wind changed and drove the smoke swirling down upon the attackers, and above, on the highest ladder, we could see the antlered men toppling, falling, impaled by arrows, striking the ladders below, sweeping their comrades to death.

A great cry of amazement burst from the defenders as they saw our armor glitter, and beheld for the first time the swift execution of arrow play. But we had no time for them. Without hesitation the Tlapallicos in the encampment wheeled about and rushed upon us.

We gave them three flights into the thick of the ranks, but with no dismay they leapt the bodies of their dead and came on. Further shooting was impossible. We threw our heavy lances, and hurling their hatchets in return, they drew long knives and we closed.

Luckily for us that we were armored men! Fortunate we, to have learned our work in a stern school.

BACK to back, we twenty met seven score, even Myrdhinn laying about him manfully. Their only shields were the soft copper breast-plates and the many copper bracelets upon their arms from shoulder to wrist, fit protection perhaps against atlatl dart and stone knife, but our good edges shore through them like cheese.

An officer hurled himself upon me. I slashed through his bead insignia, when my shortsword struck between neck and shoulder. He fell. Others came, and others. My fingers were slippery with blood. I struck till my arm wearied. I could not see how my comrades fared.

Faces came at me, howling. They went down. More faces, furiously contorted, behind them, came forward. The sword twisted in my hand. I could not tell if I was striking with the flat of it, or the edge.

My muscles were cramped with killing, and still they came. It seemed that all Tlapallan was hurling itself upon us.

Suddenly the faces were gone. I blinked. My helmet was gone, my forehead was wet, my head one great ache. I wiped the moisture out of my eyes. It was red. Half my right ear was shorn away.

Then there were howling faces before me again. I raised my sword, like as a twin to those that carved out the Roman Empire, and would if the Gods willed, carve out another here. It flew from my wet fingers. I heard a legionary cry, "Friends, Varro, friends!"

My vision cleared. I saw the Tlapallicos running like deer, saw them leap, and bound, and fall, saw cliff dwellers meet them with ax and club, and hurry on. And I beheld the fighting women of the rocks, finishing those that still moved, dying, but too proud to moan for mercy, glaring without fear into the eyes of those who wielded the knife; and I said in my heart, "Britain could be retaken with bravery like that."

And Myrdhinn went forward in his white robes, all dotted with red crosses, and made friends for us with the Elders of Aztlan.

And they named him in their language Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered Serpent, because of his beautiful feathered head-dress, and also for his guile, giving him credit for causing the wind to change which was

choking them with smoke; and we entered into their airy castle with all the pomp and adulation which deities might receive.

Now we had another language to learn, this time without much difficulty, for they were eager to teach that they might learn what manner of people we were. Although the words were dissimilar, the sentence structure of the Mias was much the same as their own, which was a help to us. Also, during the various impacts of Tlapallan's culture upon them, they had learned a few words that we also knew.

Besides, their women, who in their society had equal rights with the men, took us over and made us comfortable in their homes, treating us like kings, and we learned more than a few words from them.

The first I learned of the Azteca speech was the name of the very lovely and lovable little lady who eased my pain and brought me food as I recovered quickly from my head wounds in that dry, clean air.

Gold Flower of Day, her parents had christened her, or as we might say Aurora, not half so musically right for this delightful girl.

In a short time I was up and about, and by then among us all we had learned considerable, which we had shared as we learned it.

We were in the city of Aztlan. Less than five miles away was another city, Azatlan. But between them was a hideous country, all up and down over naked rock and deep gullies, so that one city was very little help to the other, in case of trouble.

"We must change all that," I said one night, to my companions.

"Why?" asked Myrdhinn. "We are not planning to stop here long, are we? Shall we not push on to the land of our search?"

I turned to the rest.

"What shall we do, comrades? Waste our lives in a fruitless hunt for a mythical land, or make a nation here?"

"Remain!" they chorused.

"Myrdhinn," I said, "with magic and guile you made a nation in the north. The destruction of Tlapallan is my one aim in life. Let the Gods listen! I solemnly vow never to rest until I have built a nation in this southern wilderness, that working in unison with your own nation will crack Tlapallan like a nut between hammer and stone. And here is all the magic I shall use!"

I leapt to my feet, swept out my sword and kissed the blade.

"I swear it on the cross of the sword. Who takes that vow?"

"I! I! And I!" They all gathered around.

Myrdhinn smiled — half humorously, half ruefully.

"And I, I presume, must bow to the will of the majority? After all, I suppose it is the better way."

SO THE search for the Land of the Dead ended with our advent among the cliff dwellers, though, as Myrdhinn learned, they too had legends concerning a mystical country, Mictlampa, "where the sun sleeps," from whence (a land of seven dark caves) they believe they originally came "up from below" to air and sunlight and happier life, but to which, after death, the souls of good and bad alike must return.

Almost every tribe and clan, at least in this section of Alata, has its own distinct legend, but all agree in the important belief, that they came "up from below." And we too have come to believe that somewhere, possibly in this vicinity, lies an entrance to some inner world far beneath our feet. Perhaps the ancients were right in locating Hades at the core of earth.

But we have not hunted, nor have we any intentions of doing so.

Instead, we built a new Rome, in little,

among the rocks, building it in spirit and ambition instead of marble and gold. All that can come later—was not the real Rome once a huddle of huts?

After my illness, first looking about me, this is what I saw:

A collection of some thousands of barbarians with only the beginnings of a culture and practically no religion. They revered the spirits of slain animals and saw in themselves a kinship to the beasts! Also their implements of agriculture were crude and few, and their very weapons almost worthless in comparison with ours.

Tlapallan had stunted their growth, stultified their culture, hindered their natural abilities and kept them high in the rocks lest they should utterly perish—but like an eaglet in its eyrie, whose flashing eye proclaims its proud heritage, the bold, free manner of these Azteca spoke of dauntless courage that laughed at fate and any that might attempt oppression.

Tlapallan's hatred for free communities had bred in this small people a determination to fight until death, for their freedom. They needed only the right leaders—and we had come!

Looking on them in my illness I dreamed and planned, and when I had mastered their tongue and had obtained the consent of the Elders I began to go among the young men of both the cities, selecting, marshaling, drilling—training them with the bow and shortsword.

Before us, in Alata, the sword had been an unheard-of thing, its place being taken by long knives, short javelins or the massy club; though the throwing-hatchet was no weapon to be despised.

But now came a new and ghastly weapon, a sword in name, but what a sword! Of wood it was, short, heavy, saw-edged on both sides with sharp jagged fragments of volcanic glass, a merciless weapon. I chuckled to myself, when I considered the feelings of a foe which for the first time saw a sword-using people, fired with ambition and the lust for empire, rushing to close in upon the field of battle.

To each of my companions I gave the command of a company and one proud day saw march in review before the gathered Azteca wives, families and Elders, ten centuries of martial youth, fully equipped.

The next day wives and sweethearts, dry-eyed and brave, bade farewell to their men as they marched out into the wastelands upon the long road to conquest, assimilation of the conquered and eventual empire.

The eaglet chick had broken from its shell!

Simultaneously with the people in general, from priests ordained by myself (who know nothing of priestcraft), was being preached a new religion, worthy of a fighting people, the children of Destiny.

I gave them Ceres, Lucina, Vulcan, Flora, Venus, Mars—all the Gods of old fighting Rome that I could remember, and said no more about Rome's later decadent faith than I could help.

Myrdhinn preached them love, charity, altar offerings of fruits and flowers—all the weak things that made Rome lose Britain.

He introduced the Mass, to the best of his ability, using a paste of meal and milk as his best substitute for the Host, but for such folk as these were becoming, such thoughts seemed too mild, and at the offerings of jubilation upon our safe return with captives, converts and booty, I saw blood mixed with the meal instead of milk, though Myrdhinn looked elsewhere and pretended not to see.

The folk took my remembrances of early faiths as new and divine revelation. They found their own names for the deities I had given them, and soon each had his or her own following, tended by priests who apparently rose from the ground, so soon they came into being.

Since my little legion had learned the new technique of making war, the world seemed too small for it and any enemies, no matter how far away these enemies might be. They had won a battle on unfamiliar ground and they thought themselves invincible. Constantly they begged me to lead them against new foes, and I confess I was very willing. Fighting was my profession, my very life.

We marched again. Again we returned in triumph from foray after foray, incorporating into our growing empire communities which had dwelt apart for hundreds of years scarcely knowing one another's names. As old enmities died, the little communities lost those names and became brotherly under compulsion under Aztec banners and governors.

The priests were busy from sunrise till late at night, proselyting, converting, ordaining missionaries for far villages, describing their new deities from colorful, fantastic and fertile imaginations. My poor powers of picturing heavenly attributes were far outstripped.

I shall not forget the surprise I had when, returning from a long campaign in the Land of Burned-Out Fires (a hideous, twisted country of ancient volcanic lands, cursed with eroded lava and almost devoid of comfort), I was met at the edge of our territory by a deputation of priests, bearing an effigy, easy to recognize.

It was myself life-size, clothed in mimic harness, with lorica, shortsword and helmet all complete in featherwork, cleverly and beautifully done. I chuckled to myself when I was alone, to see how worship was being shyly tendered to me in person, a grizzled, scarred, leather-and-iron centurion of Rome. Was I to become a living god—I, who had brought into being so many imaginary ones?

Gold Flower of Day (I dwelt with her family) brought me as offering, after the next morning meal, a handful of humming-birds' feathers, highly prized among these simple folk, for they are rare in the rocky valleys owing to a scarcity of flowering shrubs.

Touched by this evidence of thoughtfulness and devotion, I looked upon her with new eyes, and to preserve her gift, I tucked the quills under one of the metal strips on my lorica and for some days wore them there as I passed among the people. Often I caught sly glances upon my decoration, but thought nothing of it until one day Gold Flower of Day came and humbly begged me to permit that she sew on, with new thongs, some of the plates that had been partly torn away in the last campaign. Naturally, I gave my consent.

Judge of my surprise to find, on its return, every tiny particle of that old battle-nicked lorica completely hidden by a gorgeous and shimmering shirt of featherwork, sewn upon a backing of soft doeskin, in the most fantastic and beautiful pattern, and entirely done in feathers of the humming-bird.

All the villages subject to the twin cities had been raided by fast runners to produce feathers for that offering. It was my reward for making men out of those secluded cave-dwellers and it was a gift fit for a Cæsar! Surely not even old Picus himself ever beheld such a garment! I walked resplendent among the people, and was very proud, but not nearly as proud as the devoted eyes of Gold Flower of Day told me that she felt, when I thanked her and taught her the meaning of a kiss, for I knew that the thought was hers.

THEN one day a deputation of the Elders waited upon me and with solemn ceremony in their pit-temple below the floor of their cavern home, they christened me anew "Nuitziton" or Humming-Bird, a name which slipped far more easily from their tongue than it did from mine; but I grew accustomed to it after a while

and came to favor my Aztec name, though never did I forget that I was a Roman.

Inaction irked me, and I was plagued by the goad of ambitious dreams. We marched again, in search of new conquests, but before I left, I slipped the gorgeous tunic over the head of that effigy of mine, making the other featherwork look tawdry in comparison, and I promised the priest, whose care it was, that the circle of conquest I had begun should be broadened until we had secured enough feathers of the Nuitziton to cover the effigy completely.

That began the long-protracted War of the Hummingbirds' Feathers against the southerly, powerful, Toltec nation, which compaign lasted two long years, covered uncounted miles of territory and added thousands to my rule.

At the end of the war, my power was more than Myrdhinn's. The Aztec nation was drunk with the bloody wine of repeated success. They all but forgot the teachings of the one they had first revered as their savior, and whom in gratitude they had christened Quetzalcoatl. With never a single appeal to sorcery, I had become their one undisputed leader.

Our people, by absorbing subject villages, had enormously outgrown their cliff homes and many dwelt below on the floor of the gorges, wherever could be found sweet water and tillable lands; for much of the water hereabout is oddly colored, and death to the drinker.

At last came a day of celebration for that vast multitude which called itself Aztecan. It was the day upon which, in a temple erected for the occasion, I placed the last feather upon the head-band of the effigy, and saw that upon the entire figure there was no particle, however small, of the original substance that could be seen.

From the assemblage rose such a shout that all the mighty cliffs roundabout echoed and re-echoed.

Then advanced Myrdhinn himself, kindly enough, but awe-inspiring in his white robes of ceremony, crowned with his ritualistic head-dress of the Quetzal bird.

He placed his withered, wrinkled hands on my head in benediction, and said:

"Ventidius Varro, soldier of Rome, shipmate, leader, hope of this budding Aztec nation, in accordance with the expressed desire of their chosen religious leaders here gathered, I give you your new name before all the people. Forget the name of Ventidius and that of Nuitziton, and henceforth be known to all men as Huitzilopochtli—God of War!"

He paused, smiled a little wryly, then:

"Hail, living god!" said Myrdhinn to me (standing there, abashed, knowing him to be far the better man, and feeling myself the traitor worse than Judas, in the respect that I had stolen his power and authority), and bowed his hoary head in salutation. And all the people shouted!

16. Myrdhinn's Messenger

NOT as yet had I breathed to these people my hope of hurling the consolidated tribes against the might of Tlapallan, the hereditary oppressors of a vast country, so far as history goes among men who have no written language and preserve memories from one generation to another by painted pictures on skins or a paper made from reeds.

Nor, since our coming, had any raiders attacked the cities of Aztlan, though occasionally our war parties had met theirs, in the Debatable Lands, a country of hunger, devoid of water and nourishment, which formed our best barrier against Tlapallan's power.

Here, warriors fought to a finish, and sometimes survivors came to us with news of victory, and sometimes the news was borne to the Four Cities of the Mias, but neither side carried word of defeat.

The defeated party enriched the bellies of the wolves and wild dogs, for on that side were no survivors.

Tlapallan knew of our growing power. The Debatable Lands swarmed with their spies, who now and again came sneaking among us. Some went back and took with them the news that everywhere we were arming; took with them, too, our knowledge of the bow, so that had Tlapallan been ruled by a man with vision instead of the lecherous son of the former Kukulcan, who now held that title in his father's place, the end might have been very different. But stubbornly clinging to tradition, he kept to the atlatl, and when the time came, we, far out of range, laid his soldiers down like rows of teocentli.

After three years and a half of battling in the southwest, I now began to see my way clear to the fulfilment of that vow I made in the filthy reeking enclosure upon the Egg.

I could look about me from the tableland, far as eye could see, and all about stretched a land I might call mine. Mine by conquest! Southerly, near a broad shallow river, was allied to us by force the country of Tolteca, which I knew would march anywhere at my will, were I to point into the grinning mouths of Cerberus.

At last, speeding toward me with every sunrise, every sunset, I could sense the coming of that day when upon the ramparts of Azatlan I could give the word, and Aztlan would march, in unison with Tolteca, upon the last great foray which would settle for all time whether Aztlan or Tlapallan should rule this continent.

Yet I was not happy as I had expected to be. I brooded, life seemed miserable, I did not know what I lacked. Great aims had lost their fascination. Had I spent too much time in war? Had killing hardened my heart so that all else seemed worthless to me?

I leaned one night upon the rampart, looking easterly, thinking of the countless miles of land and sea separating me from my British home, feeling weary of life.

The light of noonday, by reflection, floods the walls of these ramparts, penetrating the deep recesses of the cave, but as the sun sinks, a dark shadow creeps across the cavern front and the interior is in gloom. A similar blackness had come over my spirit.

Toward what were my struggles tending? Could any part of my dreams come true? Could I seize a bit of these tremendous lands to call it permanently Roman, and carve out a haven for the stricken empire Myrdhinn pictured to me from his greater wisdom?—a haven for Rome to occupy and colonize and create from ruins of empire, a greater Rome that could never perish?

I had dared to dream that I could mold the future; that I could create a far-flung kingdom, knit together by roads after the pattern of Rome, crowded along all their length by marching men, traders, priests, merchants, pilgrims, with fast runners threading the throng, bringing news, taking messages, and somewhere at the center — myself, a little Cæsar who might grow huge enough to stretch a helping hand across the seas to succor my home lands in some hour of great need.

Now it seemed that success was almost within my reach, ambition had died in me. What did I lack, when everything was mine?

Lost in my dismal musings, I felt a timid touch upon my arm. I looked down. Beside me, eyes demurely downcast, as behooves a maid, stood my dainty Gold Flower of Day, and smiling upon her I knew beyond doubt why my life was empty and gray.

I threw my robe around her shoulders and kissed her, long and sweetly, and lapped in the protection of my robe we

went in to her family. Thus simply were we betrothed, and on a day of feasting and jubilation she became my bride.

No luckier man than I ever trod the earth, I know, and none ever knew a lovelier lady. For lady she truly is in her own way, nor need give one inch of precedence to talented, cultured Roman matron. She is a very real help and encouragement. I respect and honor my ruddy, warm-hearted Gold Flower of Day —barbarian!

To her belongs the credit for the rest of my achievements. Power had turned to ashes in my mouth. She gave life new zest. I went on. She had faith in me that never failed, and I could not betray it.

A LONG peace followed the subjugation of Tolteca, during which I made known my plans for the invasion of Tlapallan, which plans were polished and considered in many assemblies. Then it was drill, drill, drill, until the lowliest legionary understood the work he was to do, as well as any veteran might. Instead of centuries, my fellow wanderers had come to command cohorts, sturdy and strong, armed with spear, bow and sword, protected by shields of stout wood and hide, their bodies covered by thickly padded cloth armor, a good substitute for metal, when used only against atlatl darts.

It was thus that they passed before Myrdhinn and me in review upon a day of joy and celebration, and Myrdhinn, gazing at the stern host marching by in perfect unison, every man's accouterments exactly like his fellow's, every stride in time with a booming snakeskin drum, every spear slanted alike down the whole line, said: "Your Eagle of Aztlan has whetted his beak until it is sharp." And then, reflectively, "Have you decided what you will name the boy?"

Just then, the signifer passed, holding on its pole the old and battered Eagle of the Sixth Legion, Victrix, and staring hard at this relic, bobbing proudly above the strangely resurrected ghost of the old legion, I thought to myself that this new legion might yet know the glory of the old, and answered:

"You yourself have named him. Gwalchmai, he shall be called the Eagle, and may he have an eagle's spirit!"

So he had, for he crowed and smiled in the arms of his mother's mother, to see the martial panoply of two legions marching by on the long road to Tlapallan. At last we were on the way, marching out under banners, leaving the old and the halt behind with the women, to care for the children who were too small for war.

Everyone else followed the bronze Eagle of the Sixth—seven thousand Aztec fighting-men, and closely behind came almost as many from Tolteca.

We won through the moorlands, in early springtime, very sweet and beautiful with flowers, and I led my little nation, for although it was meant to be a fighting unit, we were laden with packs of provisions, and many large dogs (our only beasts of burden) were also laden with packs of dried meats and other foods.

Also, most of the able-bodied women had refused to be separated from their men during a struggle for freedom which could end only in the total destruction of one or the other side, and had accordingly chosen to come with us to live or die as need be. So the array looked much more like a migrant people than an army, and in it was my own Gold Flower of Day.

The journey was far more difficult than our westward crossing had been, for now we were many mouths and the season was too early for the large herds of wild cattle. Such scattered game as we sighted had generally scented the strong odor of the coming man-herd and was in flight before we were near enough to shoot.

Yet, by frequent halts, camping until hunting-parties could press on ahead and kill game, we managed to keep life in us. We were helped by those lonely moor wanderers who skulked in the high grass, in constant dread of Tlapallan's slave-raiders. When they were convinced of our friendliness, they joined us with all their knowledge of hunting-grounds and hiding-places. Without their guidance, we might easily have failed to win through unperceived, as we did almost to Tlapallan's borders, without the loss of a single soul.

A WEEK'S march from dangerous territory, in a pleasant place of small lakes and marshes, giving us hope of good hunting among the beasts and waterfowl, besides excellent fishing along shores quite unfrequented, we threw up an earthen fort, its ramparts crowned with an agger of stakes and thorns and circumvallated by a dry ditch.

We dug wolf-pits in every direction surrounding, all carefully covered, with sharp stakes at the bottom; and leaving me and my nation in safe seclusion Myrdhinn with a fighting-force of twenty picked men, five Romans, and a moorman guide, set out on a long journey around the frontier of Tlapallan, in order to reach the Hodenosaunee and find out how that folk were faring after our long absence.

Now I was sole ruler indeed, and my first orders were for the construction of a firing-platform for a ballista at each corner of our four-square fort, and these were built and placed in position.

Admittedly they were crude, being built entirely without metal, the absence of clamps being rectified by many wrappings of green hide, well shrunken into place. I had little hope of any efficient marksmanship with any such rickety engines, but I did count heavily upon their astonishing effect upon an enemy, for they were a novelty in the warfare waged in Alata. I surmised that before the ballistas were racked to bits, the enemy would have fled.

My crews of engineers became proficient in their duties and we combed the country for suitable stones without sight of enemy scouts, finding the days very dull, for three long months. Our occupations were exercising, hunting, and drilling, for every day we expected to be discovered and besieged, and here were many mouths to feed and undisciplined tempers worn raw by constant association inside strait walls.

However, we remained concealed, thanks to broad and nearly impassable forests which separated us from Tlapallan, though our position was especially happy, in that none of their highways (the large rivers) ran very near to us.

While we regained strength, great events were taking place in the North. Myrdhinn and his tiny force skirted safely the farthest outposts, again crossed the Inland Sea, and came to the log towns of the Hodenosaunee, where he was warmly greeted by that stern but honorable people, who never forgot a friend or forgave an enemy.

Once more they met our Roman companions, true sons of the forest, skin-clad, painted in the manner of their nations, most of them fathers of little Hodenosaunee, but still Roman enough at heart.

While we adventured, our friends had not been idle in preparations. Myrdhinn found the copper mines still held by the forest men, and learned that the twenty forts, which protected the Miner's Road, had never been retaken. A great store of copper had been dug and hidden away and was available for use. The frontier had moved south!

Myrdhinn's first action was the setting up of smelters and forges, where after bitter failures, a fair bronze was at last produced, though not of the quality to which the Sixth had been accustomed.

Once they had determined upon the

proper mixture of the copper and tin, molds were made from the old clamps taken from the Prydwen, which had cost so many lives and so much toil to recover. Then, other clamps were made, enough to outfit a great battery of ballistas and tormentæ, and with the remaining tin, pilum-heads were made, with bronze points and shanks of soft copper; so that in use the shanks would bend and droop, weighting down whatever shield the lance-head might be fixed within.

So departed the shining glory which had made the Prydwen a queen among ships, and her spirit entered the ruddy metal of Tlapallan to make it strong enough to bring new glory to Rome.

THE heat of early summer lay upon our fortified camp. We lay and panted and tried to sleep in our close quarters. At intervals came the challenges of the sentries, with the usual answer, "All is well."

Yet something in the dark of the moon came over the walls, avoided the sentries and came into my bedchamber. I saw the movement of it against the dimness of the door opening. I heard the scrape of its claws running at me over the hard earth. I first supposed it to be one of the dogs that frequented the camp; yet in size it was smaller than any of those. Then, thinking it to be a tree-cat from the forest, mad for food, I cast a short javelin which always was close to my hand in those days. I heard a savage yell, like nothing of earth; something struck me violently on the chest and the opening was darkened again as the creature spread broad wings and soared away.

Then there was a clamor from the wall! One of the sentries, a tall moorman, came howling down. "Puk-wud-jee! Puk-wud-jee!" he cried, in great fear, and told how its round yellow eyes had shriveled his very soul as it sailed above him while he walked his round.

Questioning him, I learned that in the belief of his people, a Puk-wud-jee was a small woods-demon, sometimes friendly, but more often inimical to man. It was always upon the alert for an opportunity to steal a man-child from its cradle board, that the baby might be fed enchanted food to cause it to shrink in size and grow to become a denizen of the wood.

He assured me in all seriousness that such things were of constant occurrence, and furthermore should this mischievous elf be seen in its true shape (for it often simulated the appearance of some common animal to further its evil designs), it inevitably brought death to the beholder. Nor would he describe it to me, being in great terror lest what he might say would also bring the curse upon me that he felt would assuredly be his bane. So I sent him to his quarters and had another guard posted in his place and returned to my own couch, smiling, for the thought now came to me of the great-eyed owl which I had seen before on two critical occasions—once as I lay in peril upon a roof in the City of the Snake, and once after my rescue as we retreated, though in a manner victors, from that place of blood.

And I suspected that this visitor of the night had brought some news from Myrdhinn, or betokened his nearness, and entering my own quarters, found that the former was the truth. Before a rushlight sat Gold Flower of Day, in her cotton nightwear, puzzling over the unfamiliar Latin letter which she had removed from a bronze cylinder that this creature had hurled at me before it fled.

So I hurriedly smoothed out the scroll, and forgot the sentry and his fears, which was unjust, for that moment he lay with his own stone knife embedded in his heart, though no one knew it till dawn.

It read: "To Varro, Legatus of Aztlan, from Merlin Ambrosius, Imperator; greeting.

"The People of the Long House await the new moon, to march upon the City of the Snake. Runners have spread the word among the tribes of Chichameca, to roll down upon the frontier forts, from the Inland Sea to the Mica Mines. The kings have agreed to attack on that date. Follow the plans we arranged. Take the fort at the junction of the rivers, garrison it, and push on to meet us. We strike with all strength. God with us! Let us avenge Marcus!

"Vale."

17. The Eagle and the Snake

NOW, after this message from Myrdhinn, we all were elated, for we had not known if our friends were alive or dead, in which latter case our plans were ruined and we must make haste to evacuate and return whence we had come. Indeed, for the last month, complaints had been growing at our inaction and the first enthusiasm was long since dulled. The people of Alata are peculiarly without patience. They can win a battle but find it difficult to win a war. They are not willing to wait, but would rather settle everything by a headlong rush, which is the reason that Mian discipline had so long held the country.

Had it not been for my constant drilling on the parade grounds and the discipline that irked their savage spirits, but which was recognized as necessary by the most intractable, I believe my force would have been halved by desertion.

However, the chief credit must go to their women, whose unquestioning faith in my aims was of much importance; for they argued to themselves as they watched the eternal marching and weapon-play, that such long training could not be for nothing, and under their criticizing looks the warriors vied for supremacy over their fellows.

Here, too, while encamped, I originated an order of knighthood, with a graduated scale of honors, colored mantles and badges which they might wear to show their rank, and much solemn ritual to be used in initiation of the chosen. I dubbed these selected few "Valiants" which became in the common talk "Braves" (though now in these latter years, the idea has spread far beyond my people, and all over Chichameca the barbarians deck themselves with feathers to denote honors attained, and any male, of age and below a king's rank, calls himself a brave).

All these things kept them under my orders, until the day when we learned that the Hodenosaunee waited only the day to pour over the borders with ax and fire. All Chichameca was seething with unrest and could the voices that rose from those dark forests have been blended into one, it would have been a cry of hate to freeze Mian blood to the last drop.

We bode our time to the appointed day. Then, leaving a guard of five centuries, the engineers, and the women, we quitted our forest home and entered the trees again, our destination being the fork where Tlapallan's two greatest river-highways met.

A strong fort was situated here, but not strong enough to resist us. Its defenders were not used to our method of fighting, the savage tribes roundabout not having the perseverance to stay with the attack and consequently they had always been thrown back.

We invested the fort, and for two days and nights shot arrows into it, many of them flaming, nor did we allow the defenders to reach water, their earthwork connections with the river being constantly pelted with a dropping patter of missiles. On the third morning, the fort surrendered.

Not a building remained standing. Everything inflammable was burned to the ground, and those defenders remaining alive were none of them unwounded.

They must have expected torture and death, but no Tlapallico flinched as they marched forth into our ranks and cast their weapons into a pile.

We fed them and set them free in their coracles, to scatter into the land and spread the tidings of our coming. We hoped that the inhabitants would seek the shelter of the forts. We could deal with forts, I felt certain, and those people left outside, by reason of cramped quarters, must of necessity be the enslaved part of the population, which I felt would hasten to join us.

Leisurely then, we rebuilt the gutted fort, sent a force back to help dismantle the fort we had encamped in and bring the women and engines here, to help make this place doubly strong. After they had arrived I increased the garrison by five centuries more, and shortly after set out up the lesser river toward the Four Cities.

While we were active in this section, to the east, north and south, all Tlapallan's frontier was rocking to the impact of the Chichamecan hordes pressing forward upon every fort in all that far-flung chain, holding the Mias and Tlapallicos inside, while the federated tribes rushed on in their thousands between the embattled fortifications.

None inside could sally forth to hinder, and drums beat unanswered and smokes talked from pinnacle to peak without any result.

Alata was a shrieking arena, and Tlapallan was becoming more of a red land than ever its christener dreamed!

We, Aztlan and Tolteca, were farther advanced than any, being well within the gates and nearing day by day the Four Cities, Tlapallan's heart. Little villages and settlements were rolled over and absorbed. Weeping women, stern-faced, broken-bodied men, bony from animal toil in the fields, armed with anything which might cut an enemy's throat or smash an oppressor's skull—so many desperate ones joined us to strike a blow for freedom, that toward the last days I gave them separate commanders, formed them into centuries and used them as shock troops, for they fought as though they had no desire to live.

FROM the frontier we entered the forest belt which lies between that and the tilled lands. At night our many fires reddened the sky—by day we marched on, unchecked, but not unhindered.

Occasionally a man would drop, pierced by an atlatl dart from some tall tree. Sometimes a boulder would fall from the heights and rebound among us. But never a battle, nor even a skirmish. I began to suspect that we were hurrying into a trap.

Once, loose stones set a whole hillside sliding, killing many of us below, the rubble flying like rocks from a battery of ballistæ. Our scouts hunted down the assailants and slew them. Our ranks reformed. We marched on—deeper and deeper into the hostile land.

Then back from a dark, close wood of pine came a tattered and dying scout, last of his band, with the word that within it a host lay in wait, of trusted Tlapallicos, and beyond them was encamped the flower of the Mian nation, ready to cut up what remained, should we struggle through.

We paused and debated. I called a council of my tribunes (they had been kings in their own right, before I came to Aztlan) and admitted several centurions from the most trusted companies of our recent additions. Many suggestions were advanced and discussed, but one of the former slaves originated the thought that saved us, and I gave that centurion the power to order and to act.

This battered, whip-scarred warrior, named Ga-no-go-a-da-we, or as we might say "Man-who-burns-hair," was of the Clan of the Bear, and had been greatly surprised to learn of his kinsmen's prowess in the north—he being of the Great Hill

People, and a slave of the first degree, ten years in unremitting toil and heartbreak for his people. Never was a man more fittingly named.

At his command, the seven centuries, under him, entered the trees, taking advantage of every rock and shrub. They made that wood theirs, as water fills the interstices in a cup full of pebbles. They fought and killed, and were killed, and a few came back. Behind those who returned, the forest flamed to high heaven—and they defiled before us, waving aloft long belts and chains of bloody scalps, armed with the finest of Mia weapons, which they brandished at the barrier of fire which held our enemy from us.

Then it became a race to circle the spreading flames, find a defensible position and be there in time to forestall the Mia army which we knew would march at once to cut us off. But they, not knowing in which direction we would be most apt to break by the burning forest, divided their forces and committed suicide.

By the time the first division, which vastly outnumbered my two cohorts, though it was half only of the original array, was ready to attack us, we had thrown up earthworks, fronted by a deep ditch, and were almost ready for them.

They camped, night being upon us, and being out of atlatl shot they thought themselves safe; but by the time they were well settled, our bows rained death among them, some lucky shots setting fire to dry grasses near their supply of food, causing them much damage.

The fear of hunger was responsible the next day, though their camp was now out of bow-shot, to decide their commander in risking an immediate attack instead of waiting for the other section.

Just at daybreak they rushed our works.

Beyond atlatl range they began to drop by scores, then by hundreds.

They littered the meadowland; they struggled into a little swamp and made solid footing there with their own dead bodies; they choked a brook that gave us drink, till the very course of it was changed and it ran red and wild like a mad, living thing across the meadow, drowning the wounded who lay in its course. They came nearly to the works, faltered, reeled back and fled. Down upon their heads and backs drove pitiless arrow-sleet, piercing plates of copper and mica, harrying them, scattering them, far as bow could reach.

They re-formed and came again. Gods! What men they were!

This time they gained the rampart, but it was a feeble stroke they dealt. Ax and knife and spear could not down my matchless swordsmen. From afar the Mias had died, struck down by the new weapon their Kukulcan had been too slow, too niggardly, to furnish them. Their ruler was a man of little vision, a lecher, uxorious with his women, and because of it his country died!

Now his betrayed soldiers met still another new weapon—the pitiless, mutilating maccuahuitl, the sword with glass fangs, which smashed down and tore flesh apart in a single stroke.

They had never dreamed of an instrument like a sword. They threw their lances, closed to finish with ax and knife, and were hurled away, maimed, mangled, beaten, and when the ramparts were clean the terrible bows behind them sang death to the runners again.

So the Eagle of Aztlan bit deep into the Snake of Tlapallan!

It was a red day and we longed for rest, but we knew the woods were full of wanderers, and somewhere an untried, unafraid army of Mias and Tlapallicos was hunting along our track.

We searched the meadow for arrows and other weapons, ate and drank and were easy in our camp, but our sentinels were alert.

THE day ended, and in a black night, hidden from spies among the trees, we dug till skies began to lighten, making wolf-pits to trap the enemy we expected. And it was well we did, for by the third hour of light they were upon us.

They could hardly have allowed themselves much time for rest, after their long journey, for some staggered with weariness as they debouched into the clearing.

Yet, as they saw us there entrenched, new spirit came to them, and without a cry or cheer they charged across the bodies of their dead.

Nearer they came and nearer, and not an arrow flew.

"Steady!" I passed down the word along the line. "Steady! Wait till they strike the pits!"

Closer still, they surged upon us in a wide crescent with leveled lances. Upon their grim faces we could see stern determination and we knew they meant to end the affair at once, without mercy.

To them we represented all that was evil, savage and vile. We were to be obliterated, stamped into the ground.

Behold them as they charge! Their bodies glisten with sweat and oil. Their long conical heads are flung back in pride. The stag antlers upon the helmets clash and rattle, mica scales and burnished copper glitter in the morning sun. The ground rumbles to their tread.

They are coming! The undefeated hosts of Tlapallan, the terrible disciplined array that conquered the irregular scattered tribes of Alata and stole the best lands in a continent! They come, and Aztlan, the despised, but also undefeated, is waiting, with arrow feathers close against the ear.

Man-who-burns-hair raises the shout of the scalp dance:

"Ha-wa-sa-say!
Hah!
Ha-wa-sa-say!"

Someone stops him.

Now they rush into the thick of the heaps of dead. A young officer leaps from the ranks, copper plate upon his antlers betokening high rank. He bounds into the air, brandishing his lance, and howls like a wolf.

He waves on his company, now ululating their war-cry, "Ya-ha-ee-hee!"

He leaps again and hurls his lance—an empty threat—they are yet too far—and drops to earth which opens and swallows him whole, gulping him from sight, and the roar of wonder from his men is threaded by his cry as the stake below tears through his entrails.

Then the whole front rank, pushed on by those behind, drops into the wolf-pits. The drumming thunder of the sandaled charge dies down, and into those left standing our winged arrows bite.

I give credit to brave men.

They re-formed amidst the arrow-flight and came on, filling the second row of pits level full of dead men over which their comrades advanced. Atlatl darts buzzed and whined over our wall. They struck the third row, faltered and were checked but not halted.

The fourth row was too much. When almost touching our earthworks they broke and ran, and our arrows cut them down as hail lays flat the corn. Their officers beat and beseeched them, but being flesh and blood, not iron, they would not stand, and behind them as they fled I saw officer after officer, the highest and the low, fall upon his lance and go to his gods with honor untarnished by defeat.

I could hold my fierce people no longer. With exultant cries of "Al-a-lala! Al-a-lala!" they poured over the earthworks, streamed among the empty pits and dashed after the Mias, I leading, lest I be left entirely behind.

As we neared the wood, out burst the remnants of that mighty Mia army in close

array, like a wounded bear, blood-blind, who smites about him in every direction, hoping to kill before he dies.

Shame was burning them and they meant to make their mark upon us!

Then our long days of discipline told. Peremptorily my trumpet sang through the shouting, answered shrilly by the war-whistles held by tribunes and centurions, and instantly our whole ragged advance stiffened from a mob into an army, whose even ranks separated, giving room to those behind that they also might shoot. Now, facing the Mias, stood the harrow formation of the quincunx, from which poured such a devastating volley that the attackers shrank back upon themselves.

"Stand fast!" I shouted, expecting a rally, but they were beaten. They broke and ran, scattering for the last time.

A great cry went up from behind me. Man-who-burns-hair plunged past, his face like a fiend's, dabbled with paint, distorted with hate and fury. Following him, the slave centuries entered the forest, out of formation, obeying no command, hunting, each man for himself like a hungry pack of wolves harrying the fleeing deer, chasing the panic-stricken antlered man-herd.

NOT many returned. In the forest they fought and died, counting death a little thing in the avenging of so many wrongs. A few came back while we were hunting out the bodies of our dead and piling them into a mound for mass burial, outfitting each with weapons and water bottle to be used in the long journey to Mictlampa, Land of the Dead. Others appeared while the priests were writing out the passes which each must have on the journey, in order to go unhindered by precipices and dangerous monsters. All the dogs in camp were killed, that they might precede their masters into the underworld and help them across the last barrier —a broad river.

How Myrdhinn would have been shocked, could he have seen it!

I myself was more than a little dismayed at the treatment of our numerous captives. Many were flayed, to the glory of the gods, others killed in unfair combat, being tethered by one foot to a stone, and pitted singly with toy weapons against four fully-armed men, while a large basket called "The Cup of Eagles" was completely filled with the hearts taken from those who had been fastened to scaffolds and filled with arrows there that their blood might drip upon the ground as a libation to the gods. And I was one of the gods!

I was glad that Myrdhinn was away.

At length these dreadful rites were over, though night came upon us before the heap of bodies was smoothly rounded with well-tamped earth.

We made tamalli cakes of meal and supped, though there were many, I knew but could not prevent, who had red meat, though it had been long since we had hunted for game.

In the night I heard a whisper at my hut-entrance. "Tecutli [Lord]." I did not answer, but in the morning found Man-who-burns-hair lying across the opening, the last to return from the harrying.

He was no longer commander of many, nothing now but a simple centurion, for no more than that number of slaves were now alive to march behind him, but when we moved out of that glade of death and vengeance he bore himself with as proud a carriage as any Cæsar at the head of a triumph. One could see that never more could he be a slave. He had bought back his manhood with blood.

You will not want to miss the exciting chapters that bring this story to a conclusion in next month's WEIRD TALES. We suggest that you reserve your copy now at your magazine dealer's.

The Phantom Drug

By A. W. KAPFER

THIS document, written in a clear, bold hand, was found in the burned ruins of an old insane asylum. The records of this institution had been saved, and upon investigation it was found that an eminent drug analyst was confined within its walls for one of the most horrible crimes ever recorded. He was judged and found insane after telling, as his defense, a fantastic story which was interpreted as a maniac's delusion. After reading his story, which coincides so well with the known facts, one cannot help but wonder. . . .

IT'S night again—one of those threatening, misty nights that you see in dreams. I'm afraid of it—it returns like a mockery to goad my memory to greater torture. It was on a night much like this that it happened; that horrible experience that gives my mind no rest—that fear that gives shadows ghostly forms and lends an added terror to the scream of an insane inmate. They put me in a madhouse because they judged me insane—me, whose mentality is so inexpressibly superior to those that judged me mentally unbalanced.

They wouldn't believe the facts I told them—said my story was the fabrication of an unsound mind, as an alibi for the horrible crime I had committed. I swore on my honor that I had told the truth, but even my friends refused to believe me; so it is with little hope of winning your credence that I leave this written document. But here are the facts.

I was at work in my laboratory analyzing some drugs that I had received in a new consignment from India. A tube, which contained a phosphorescent liquid, attracted my attention and I read the note my collector had sent with it.

He stated that it was supposed to have the power of transforming the mind of a human into the body of an animal; a superstition which the natives of the inner jungle firmly believe. They claim it is compounded from the brains of freshly slain animals, each brain containing an amount of this substance relative to its size.

I naturally scoffed at the claims for this drug, but decided to test it on one of my laboratory animals so that I could place it in its proper category. I injected a small amount into the system of a rabbit and

watched closely the reaction. For a minute it was motionless except for the natural movements of breathing. Then its eyelids closed slowly until they were completely shut and it appeared to be in a deep lethargy. For half a minute more there appeared no change; then its eyes flicked open and I looked, not into the timid eyes of a rabbit, but those of a scared animal.

With a sudden spring it leaped for the laboratory light, which was suspended by a chain from the ceiling. Its paws, however, were unfitted to grip the chain or the sloping reflector, and it fell to the floor only to spring frantically at the curtain in a vain attempt to climb it. Another leap sent it to the top of a cabinet, where it upset several bottles, which fell to the tiled floor and smashed.

This aroused me from my stupor and I endeavored to catch it. I might as well have tried to catch its shadow. From cabinet to mantel, from mantel to curtain, curtain to shelf, leaving a trail of spilled and broken bottles in its wake. As it sprang about, strange squeaky barks came from its throat.

Perspiring and out of wind I gave up the chase, picked up an overturned chair and sat down to ponder the matter out. I observed the rabbit's actions closely. Now it was on a shelf looking at its short stump of a tail and chattering excitedly. Then it rubbed its ears and seemed startled at their length.

I wondered what was the explanation of this. It flew around like a monkey. A monkey—that was it. The drug made animals act like monkeys. Then the claim of the natives was true and the drug did have the power of performing a transition! I wondered if the drug always had the same result and decided to test it again on a white mouse that I took from another cage.

I carefully injected a small amount into its bloodstream. After a minute had expired, during which it made no move, it began to twitch about. The blood was pounding in my temples and my eyes were glued to its quivering form. Slowly it roused from its stupor and then stood on its hind legs while it flapped the front ones by its side.

"What the deuce——" I began. Then I understood. The drug affected each animal differently, dependent on the amount of the dose. As I arrived at this conclusion I noticed the rabbit was hopping about in its natural way, all trace of its former erratic movements gone. Never before in my experience had any drug such a startling effect on the brain as to give it the complete characteristics of a different animal.

MY OLD and dearest friend, Rodney Caleb, was living with me and I went to his room to tell him what had occurred. He was lying on the bed covered by a heavy blanket which did not entirely conceal the hulking form, once the proud possessor of enormous strength, now robbed by sickness and old age. He was twenty years older than I. He liked to talk of the days when his prowess was commented upon where strength and courage counted. His voice still held some of its old timbre as he greeted me and noticed my excitement.

"Hello," he said. "Something interesting happen?"

With eager enthusiasm I detailed the effects the drug had had on the rabbit and the mouse. I could tell, from the expression on his face, that he was intensely interested, but when I had finished he lay back on his pillow as if in deep thought.

"Doc," he said quietly, "I think that at last I am going to have my wish fulfilled."

I looked at him uncomprehendingly.

"You know," he said, growing excited, "you know how I've longed to have my old strength back again, or, at least to be active for a time; well, there you have the substance that can perform that miracle."

"What do you mean?" I gasped.

"Why can't I take some of that drug," he reasoned, "and control the body of some animal for a while?"

"Rodney, you are crazy," I cried aghast. "I will not consent to your doing such an insensate thing. It would mean your death within a few minutes. Can you imagine yourself as a monkey, hopping and swinging about, with that old body of yours? It could never stand the strain."

"You forget something," he smiled.

"What?" I asked.

"My mind would no longer control this body, but that of some active and healthy animal."

"I should say not——" I began, then stopped and reasoned the matter out. The rabbit had been controlled by a monkey's mind; what happened to the rabbit's mind? It was only logical to suppose that they had been exchanged and that some monkey in far-off India had been hopping about like a rabbit during the transition.

"It is probable," I admitted, "that you would be controlling another body, but you forget that your body would be controlled by an animal's mind. That would be far more risky, as was proved by the rabbit's antics in the laboratory."

"You can take care of that," he argued, "by giving me a potion to numb the motor area of my brain, and by giving me a sleeping-powder. Then, no matter what impulse is aroused, it cannot be carried into an action."

I pondered his words carefully, and had to admit to myself that his reasoning was plausible. Rodney pleaded his cause with desperate earnestness.

"Here am I, an old man, chained to a bed for the rest of my life—a year or so at the most. Life holds little attraction for me, handicapped as I am. My body is weak, but the spirit of adventure is still strong within me. Surely you cannot deny me this favor; if not to gratify the wish of an old man, then on the claim of our friendship."

"I have but one thing left to say," I replied, "and that is—if you take some of this drug, then so will I."

Rodney hesitated at involving me in his rash wish.

"It is not necessary for you to do so," he said. "You are healthy, and in the name of your profession you owe the world a service. Nothing claims me."

"Nevertheless, that arrangement stands," I said. "Do you think I could ever bear to have anything happen to you through this enterprise, without my sharing it? Never. We have stood together in all things in the past and will continue to do so until the end."

Rodney placed his hand on mine. Neither of us spoke for a few minutes, but we felt the bond of friendship more closely than ever before.

"I can't ask you to risk it," he said huskily, and tried to hide the disappointment that his voice betrayed.

"And I cannot refuse your wish," I replied. "Besides, it is in a way my duty to undergo an experience that may prove of value in research. I must admit that I feel thrilled at the prospects of this adventure too. When shall we try it?"

"I am ready now," he replied. "What preparations are necessary?"

"Hardly any," I said. "I'll go down to the laboratory to get the sedatives and a hypodermic needle for this drug. I may as well bring my safety kit along."

Before I locked the back door I glanced out into the night. The air was surcharged and oppressive, and the uncanny stillness that precedes a storm sent a chilling premonition over me.

I locked the door, gathered the articles I needed and returned to the bedroom.

"An electrical storm is coming up," I said.

Rodney did not answer. His eyes were on the tube containing the phosphorescent

drug. He was breathing faster and becoming excited and impatient.

"Better quiet down a bit, Rod," I admonished. My own heart was pumping strangely and the air seemed exceedingly warm. I thought it best to hide my perturbation from him, however. An unexpected crash of thunder made our nerves jump.

"We're as nervous as a couple of kids on their first pirate expedition," laughed Rod. His voice was high-pitched and taut.

I mixed a sedative and a sleeping-potion for him and a stronger mixture for myself. These we drank. Then I took off my coat, bared my left arm and bade Rod roll up his pajama sleeve.

"We shall not feel the effects for a minute or two," I told him, "and by that time the potion we drank will start its work. Just lie quiet."

I forced my hand to be steady as I injected the drug into his arm, then hastily refilled the needle chamber from the tube and emptied it into my own arm. Rodney had put his hand by mine as I lay down beside him and I clasped it fervently. A drowziness crept over me as the seconds slipped by; then—something snapped, and I knew no more.

AN UNFAMILIAR atmosphere surrounded me when my mind began to function again. Slowly the haze wore away and I stirred restlessly as strange impressions flooded my brain. I was among a heavy growth of trees, rank grass and bush. My nose felt peculiar to me; then I cried out in wonder. It was not a faint ejaculation that came from my throat, however, but a roar—a volume of sound that made the very earth tremble, and with good cause; for I, or rather my mind, was embodied in an elephant. My nose!—it was now a trunk!

I became intoxicated with the thought of the strength I now possessed, seized a tree with my trunk, and with a mighty tug, pulled its roots from the ground and hurled it aside. My cry of satisfaction was a boom that rolled like a peel of thunder.

A low growl sounded behind me and I swung my huge bulk quickly around. A tiger lay crouched in the undergrowth. I raised my trunk threateningly and stamped angrily, but the beast did not move. Then I looked into its eyes and understood. It was Rodney! He had possession of a tiger's body!

He was overjoyed at my recognizing him, and although we could not talk to each other, we showed our pleasure plainly enough. He gloried in the agility and strength that were now his, and took prodigious leaps and flips in a small clearing.

Finally, tired and winded from his play, he came to me and rubbed his back against my leg, purring like an immense cat. With a flip of my trunk I swung him on my back and raced through the jungle for miles. A river cut its way through this wilderness and we drank our fill—a gallon of water seemed but a cupful to my stupendous thirst. I was amusing myself by squirting water on Rodney when a roar came from a distance, accompanied by heavy crashings.

We faced the direction of the disturbance and waited breathlessly. Over the top of the waving jungle grass there appeared the head of an angry elephant. That its temper was up was all too plain. Its ears stuck out from its head like huge fans and its upraised trunk blasted forth a challenge as it charged along.

I looked anxiously at Rodney. The light of battle was in his eyes and I knew that he would be a formidable ally. It was too late to flee. My opponent was too close and the river was a barrier which, if I tried to cross, would give my adversary the advantage of firmer footing. My temper was aroused also, and as it was not my own body that was at stake, I did not fear the coming conflict.

The huge elephant facing me charged, and I met him half-way. Two locomotives crashing together would not have made that glade tremble more than it did when we met.

My enemy gave a scream of fear and pain when we parted and I soon saw the reason why. Rodney had waited until we were locked, then had launched himself at the throat of my rival. He had sunk his teeth deep into its tough hide and was tearing the flesh from its shoulder and chest with his bared claws.

All this I had seen in an instant, and as the monster turned on Rodney, I charged it from the side, driving both tusks deep in. Almost at the same instant Rodney severed its jugular vein. The elephant trembled, swayed, and toppled to the ground.

I was unhurt except for an aching head, the result of the first onslaught, but Rodney had not fared so well. As we turned from our fallen adversary I noticed that one of his legs had been crushed. The light of victory was in his eyes, however, and he seemed happy despite the pain he must have been suffering.

It was then that I noticed a change coming over me; a sort of drowsiness. At first I thought it was due to the exertion I had just gone through, but as its effect became more marked and insistent, I realized with a tremor of terror what it really was. The elephant's mind was trying to throw my own out of possession of its body!

I glanced at Rodney apprehensively to see if he was undergoing the same change. He was still in complete control. Then the truth dawned on me. The immense bulk I had been dominating had absorbed the power of the drug faster than the body Rodney controlled!

I hurried to his side and tried to make him understand that he should crawl into the jungle and hide until the effect of the drug had worn off. It was of no use. The more I stamped and raged, the more his eyes smiled at me as though he thought I was trying to show him how pleased I was at our victory.

More and more insistent and powerful did the elephant's mind become. It began to get control of its body and fixed its eyes with a baneful glare on Rodney's recumbent form. I struggled desperately to wrest control from that conquering mind, but in vain. The drug's force was ebbing fast.

One last warning I managed to blast out, and Rodney faced me. Horror of horrors! He thought I was calling him! Slowly and painfully he crept toward me. My thoughts became dim, and I struggled, as if in a dream, to conquer again the huge bulk he was approaching, but it was too late.

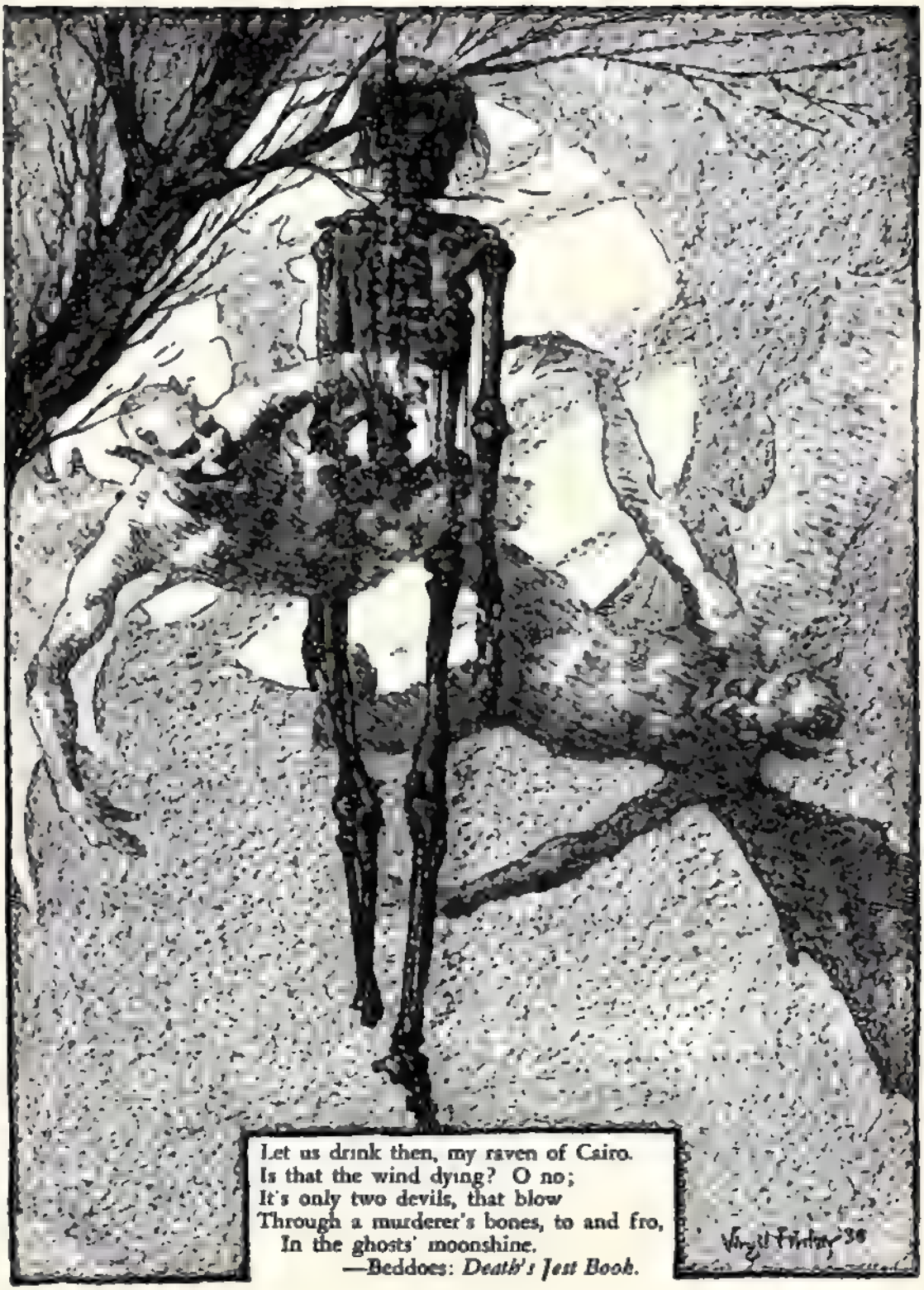
The monster I had once controlled was in almost complete possession now, and I was but an unwilling spectator viewing things through a veil that grew steadily heavier.

When Rodney was but a few feet away the body under me reared in the air—a flash of fear showed in Rodney's eyes as he realized the awful truth—and as his shrill scream rent the air, I was swallowed into blackness.

I DON'T know how long I lay in a daze, in Rodney's bedroom. Consciousness came back slowly. As events crowded themselves into my mind, I felt for Rodney's hand. It was not by my side. I sat up in bed, weak, and trembling all over.

At first I did not see him; then—I screamed in terror!

Rodney lay beside the bed, *every bone in his body broken as though something weighing several tons had crushed him!*


Let us drink then, my raven of Cairo.
Is that the wind dying? O no;
It's only two devils, that blow
Through a murderer's bones, to and fro,
In the ghosts' moonshine.
—Beddoes: *Death's Jest Book.*

YOU, the readers, often ask what we mean by a "weird tale." The word *weird* originally referred to the Three Sisters, or Fates, who were supposed to have the power to foresee and control future events. By extension, the word came to refer to anything of a mysterious or unearthly character, and anything uncanny. WEIRD TALES, which for sixteen years has been the foremost exponent of the weird, the supernatural and the fantastic in fiction, also includes the horror-tale as exemplified in Edgar Allan Poe's stories, and highly imaginative tales that peer into the distant future with the eye of prophecy.

A Night in Malneant

Leo Sonderegger writes from Lincoln, Nebraska: "May I put in a word of appreciation for *A Night in Malneant?* It is one of the most beautifully written stories you have carried in some time, I think, and is reminiscent of Poe. *Spawn of the Maelstrom* was excellent too. Your last issue was a good one all around. To mention Poe again, I think it is true that if he were writing today his stories would be appearing in WEIRD TALES."

No Lack-a-brain

Caroline Ferber writes from Chicago: "Late again, but still around to cover the August issue. First, the cover. Wow! wotta blazer! It actually makes me warm to look at it—or is that some of the hot weather in these parts? The story it illustrates left me with a pleasant sensation of being well-entertained. The thoroughly matter-of-fact style of narration gave a touch of humor to an otherwise creepy yarn. Author Price did well by himself with *Apprentice Magician.* Say, now—I completely enjoyed *The Valley Was Still.* I was directly with Trooper Paradine in the awful quiet valley with its death-like sleepers and the crack-brained old-timer. Gosh, such a relief it was to slice off the old codger's head. Didn't even skeer me a whit. Horrors—horror—e v i l—power-lust—a mad world. *Spawn* left me in a chaotic state of mind—and I'm still not clear about it, although it portrays allegorically what might happen in this present mad world. Was rather disappointed in *The Little Man,* in that one expects a more adventurous type of work from Clifford Ball. Mustn't forget Seabury Quinn and *The House of the Three Corpses.* Scairt?—Say, my flesh was crawling every time I thought of centipedes. There certainly was enough of tenseness and mystery. Shall we call *Giants in the Sky* a bit of fantasy? It was a pleasant tale, from the giant's viewpoint. Finlay's picturization of the net makes me feel that it is gold—very delicate. And so ended *Almuric.* Needless to say, packed with adventure on a strange world, with new angles of battling enemies at every turn, I enjoyed every line. Howard seemed to have put his all into this—he introduced a new character, whom we will never meet again in further adventures. It was an excellent story. As for requests, votes, or which—I would like some more of Elak of Atlantis. [You shall have another Elak story, *Dragon Moon*—and a good one it is, too.—THE EDITOR.] My appetite for stories of that lost

land is insatiable. Would also like to see Rald again. My vote on the best in the August issue, outside of *Almuric,* is *Apprentice Magician.* Looking through the Eyrie, I am inclined to agree with some of the readers' suggestions to cut down the lettering on the cover. Have a few names, but don't spread them over the illustration. Looks cheaplike, sorta. Must now admit I've reached the end of my rope—without a single "oogy." Trust Mr. Wilkos of my own home town will be more satisfied. Yeah—the shoe fit, C. W. —but *I yam not* lack-a-brained!"

Articles in WT

Herbert Vincent Ross writes from London, England: "Why don't we have a serious side to WT? Why not articles? I should like to see some serious articles by Gans T. Field on Reincarnation, Vampires, Witchcraft, Werewolves, Elementals, Atlantis, Lemuria, Egypt, India, Stonehenge, Easter Island, old Grecian mythology, etc., etc. I feel certain this would develop into one of the most interesting sections of the magazine. Why not also a "Questions and Answers" department? I know that to some materialistic-minded people the above subjects are just plain nonsense, but I am convinced that a grain of truth exists behind most them; after all, the so-called supernatural of today is the science of tomorrow. I think science will more than ever in the future prove from a different angle some of the things which are laughed at today; this is where 'science-fiction' and 'Weird Tales' meet. Same thing, different angle."

[WT being a magazine of escape from the drab realities of life, our readers have shown that they resent our using space for fact articles which could be devoted to entertaining weird stories.—THE EDITOR.]

No Reprints, Please

Erle Korshak writes from Chicago: "I was pleasantly surprised to find the current issue at 15 cents up to its usual standard. Finlay's cover was a fine piece of work, portraying deep expression. As to stories—well, *The House Without a Key* was an excellent piece of work. *Spawn of the Maelstrom* was only fair but its Finlay illustration was a honey. *A Night in Malneant* was a gem. *King of the World's Edge* promises real enjoyment in coming issues. My main complaint lies in that rather trashy yarn *While Zombies Walked;* it had no place in WEIRD TALES. *Spanish Vampire* is the type we should see more often, as it has a refreshing style. My pet peeve concerning WT is caused by your reprints. Many readers of WT have been reading for many years, and believe space taken by reprints to be wasted. I certainly find no enjoyment in seeing one of your stories printed again in later issues. I am sure it would be better for all concerned if you would give us a new story in place of these reprints."

Grace and Style

Frank L. Baer writes from Washington, D. C.: "It is interesting to note that Seabury Quinn is getting away from his French detective and producing some fiction that stands up on its own feet. For years he has put those two stock characters through their paces and it is high time they be given a long vacation. Quinn writes remarkably well when he links the fantastic and the historical; he stretches himself, injects magic in the telling of his tales and achieves some striking and serious effects. *The Door Without a Key* is a case in point. Like Hergesheimer he relates his yarn with grace and style; unlike Lovecraft he is not compelled to fall back on monstrosities, distorted conglomerations of matter and muck, giants of outer space. . . . Quinn has imaginative power, a sense of balance in creation and paints in a vivid, convincing background. Take a look at *Roads* and then tell me why in hell you ever let him write about that allegedly comic Frenchmen, who runs amok through the state of New Jersey. Give him freer rein and he'll be your best bet. [All our authors have free rein and the editor chooses or rejects.—The Editor.] It is too early to comment on the Munn story. Thank heaven he has used Welsh spellings for his Arthurian characters. I say Welsh—they have been altered slightly, just enough to make them different—and that means he has dipped into the Triads; probably into Rhys as well."

Fifteen Cents

Ray Douglas Bradbury writes from Los Angeles: "Though I have read and enjoyed

WEIRD TALES for two years, have bought every issue back to 1932 in that time, and considered writing many times, this is my first missive, brought about by the change of price in your magazine. There is not much I can say except that at first, on hearing the news in New York during the fantasy convention period, I was crestfallen. On my way back to Los Angeles I chewed the problem mentally and found myself thinking WEIRD TALES can't possibly bring out a good mag at that price —fifteen cents. I am very happy to see that I was wrong. The cover alone on the September issue was worth the money. The issue resembled the WEIRD TALES of a year ago. It had lost some of its fat (the extra thirty-odd pages) and gone back to its former slim voluptuity which we all admired. No more bulky WEIRD TALES. Bravo! The stories pleased me exceedingly. Lovecraft again proved his wizardry of words by chilling me with a draft of *Cool Air*. I knew what was coming —but what a splendid build-up he gives us in his tales. No poetry this month. My only complaint on the issue. How about some more verse by Lovecraft? To me he is the Poe of poetry. Quinn was very good this time, as was C. A. Smith. Those two always manage to please."

Bits of Poetry

Robert Sherk writes from Buffalo: "Congratulations on your new style—long may it reign! But I hope you will not omit those bits of poetry that you used to print, for poetry has always been my favorite type of literature; and I'm sure many others will agree with me."

A Slyly Humorous Touch

Donald V. Allgeier writes from Springfield, Missouri: "You're sure to have a lot of compliments on the September cover. I unhesitatingly pronounce it Finlay's best and a perfect symbolic cover for a weird magazine. The best story in September is *Spanish Vampire*. Price is not a favorite of mine but he rings the bell this time. A vampire story with a slyly humorous touch is a welcome relief after the many which strive to create a feeling of horror. It's hard to choose between *Spawn of the Maelstrom* and *The Door Without a Key* for second honors. The Derleth yarn is not original in conception but is masterfully done. And once again I am made to feel that Seabury Quinn is not only a writer of exciting tales, but an author of great literary merit as well. He has the touch of a master and his works would not be out of place in the most select publication. Now, after long consideration, I hail Seabury Quinn as a greater writer than either Lovecraft or Howard. (Of course I know in advance that that statement will bring down the fans of those two writers on my neck.) *A Night in Malneant* is another exquisite pen painting by Smith. It gave me a start to see that it concerned the lady Mariel. I know a lady by that name and it is an unusual name. I'd still like to see Smith's *End of the Story* reprinted. And, speaking of reprints, I'm awfully tired of Bassett Morgan's habit of transplanting brains. Let's change our diets of reprints a little, please, and leave him out. Maybe Howard, huh? *Cool Air* is one of Lovecraft's best. . . . Best wishes to WT in its new size and price range. A bargain if there ever was one! I hope you get a million new readers."

Typically Weird

F. J. Owen, Jr., writes from New York City: "The September issue is exceptionally good. I personally preferred *The Door Without a Key* and *Spanish Vampire* as the best. I liked *King of the World's Edge* and *Cool Air*. The rest of the stories to me were typical of the weird and none were what I would call poor."

Well Conceived and Well Told

Richard H. Hart writes from New Orleans: "I'm glad to see you reduce the price, as there must be thousands of potential readers who have in the past let the magazine go unsampled because of its apparent high price. We're going to miss the former generous size, of course, but we can't have everything at once and I've no doubt the increase in circulation will eventually justify the addition of another story or so. Quinn's story is undoubtedly the best in the issue, being both

well conceived and well told. For second choice, I'll take Munn's saga; it is quite interesting, and should get better as it goes along. I think Price's humorous vampire yarn rates third place. I'd probably have given that berth to McClusky, except that I've never cared for *zombies.*"

A Plea for Brundage

G. E. Carter writes from Washington, D. C.: "Having enjoyed your magazine for five years I feel obliged to thank you for the care in selection of stories—and the high standard. Now there may be still a few old fogies in this age who object to nudes—aren't there always? But after framing five or six of Brundage's works, I have had them mistaken for Petty's art more than once. To us young kiddies of eighteen that answers all! But with or without Brundage, WT is the choice, though it's the only magazine I read. I believe if I went hunting in Africa I'd try to find some way of purchasing one there. You know your mag but pul-lease, if you get enough requests for Brundage, will you be a nice Editor and put just one or two of hers in? You might even start a department offering copies (suitable for framing) of Brundage's art. Most touching story: *The Door Without a Key.* Most woogie (best): *Cool Air.* I never make a friend till he says, 'Yes, I read WEIRD TALES.' "

General Julius Caesar

I. O. Evans writes from Tadworth, Surrey, England: "Some time back you were good enough to print a letter I wrote regarding certain inaccuracies concerning Cornwall in one of your stories. I hope now you will allow me space to comment on your story, *The Dark Isle,* by Robert Bloch in the May issue. As a Welshman I wish to stand for the fair fame of the Island of Anglesey, called by the Welsh, because of its singular fertility, *Mon nam Cymry* (Mona the Motherland of Wales). Your author's description of the island is hardly happy. He speaks of a 'thousand-foot drop of sheer rock' though as a matter of fact Mona is unusually flat! He speaks of its inhabitants, and those of Wales generally, as 'savage blue-painted Britons,'

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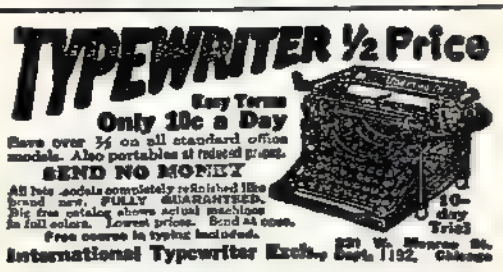
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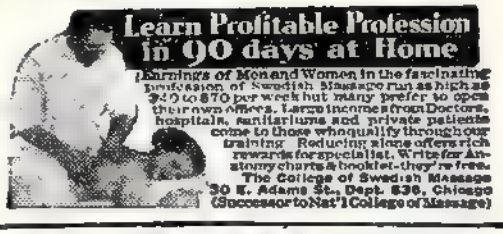
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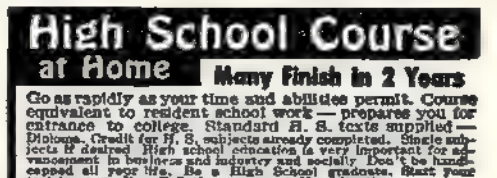
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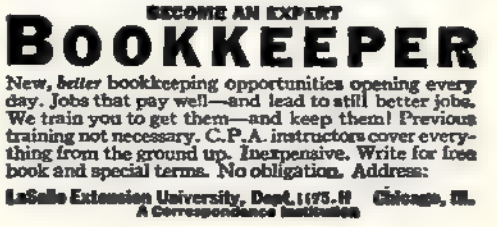
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though indeed the country was not savage at all, but had a well-developed civilization which the Romans destroyed. As for the blue paint, I know that is rumor, but it hardly sounds adequate, if the climate of Britain were anything like what it is today. Sorcerers with mystic powers, revived corpses, sea serpents with venomous tongues are of course legitimate enough in a weird tale. But it is another matter to accuse the dignified priesthood of the Druids of 'unspeakable sacrifices' and all manner of unpleasantness. Particularly I am surprised to see that preposterous story of the giant human figures of wickerwork filled with captives and burned alive that used to embellish nursery history-books. Has your contributor ever tried to think out the problems involved in such a construction, considered merely as a work of engineering? What evidence do these atrocity stories rest on? The memoirs and propaganda of General Julius Caesar who, anxious to rouse enthusiasm for an unpopular and expensive war among the Romans, fell back on the time-honored method of saying what unpleasant people the enemy were. These are, indeed, about as worthy of serious credence as the stories told by their conquerors of the wickedness today of the Chinese, the Abyssinians and the Czechs. It is ironical that such atrocity-mongering has ever been swallowed by the descendants of the people about whom it was devised. The Britons of old had their giants, it is true—huge figures cut into turf; any readers of your excellent magazine who visit Britain should make a point of seeing the Giant of Cerne Abbas and his brother of Wilmington. No doubt they were religious in origin, but there is no reason to connect them with human sacrifice."

Drama, Love, Weirdness

B. Reagan writes from Pittsburgh: "In your September issue, Quinn does it again. Drama, love and weirdness are combined by a real author. There can be no doubt as to the best story in this issue. McClusky easily takes second place with his *While Zombies Walked*. Third place goes to Derleth and Schorer for *Spawn of the Maelstrom*. And the humorous tale of the *Spanish Vampire*

was well written. It might be advisable to suggest to Munn and Morgan that readers like weird fiction. This suggestion applies to you also. Munn's tale sounds like impressions of a hangover."

Concise Comments

C. Leigh Stevenson writes from San Juan, Puerto Rico: "I have been impressed by the literary quality of a great many of your stories and with the extreme cleverness of much of the plotting."

Richard Kraft writes from Long Branch, New Jersey: "I'd like to add my vote to those clamoring for a semi-monthly WT. This is a great idea!"

Jean Madison writes from Springfield Gardens, Long Island: "My favorite in the September issue (yes, I pick a favorite, now and then) was *The Door Without a Key*. *Spanish Vampire* was just about how a modern youth *would* act. *Cool Air* was very good. So were all the rest. The new serial is very good."

Clark Ashton Smith writes from Auburn, California: "I enjoyed the Derleth-Schorer collaboration greatly. *Cool Air* is certainly one of the best of Lovecraft's briefer tales."

Most Popular Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? Write a letter or a postcard to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City. And if perchance some of our stories strike a sour note with you, let us know about those also. Many men, many minds! Your favorite story in the September issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was Seabury Quinn's romantic weird tale, *The Door Without a Key*.

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31x5.25-21	2.95	1.35
6.50-17	3.45	1.45
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.45
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.45
29x6.00-18	3.40	1.45
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PROF. ANTHONY BARKER
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COMING NEXT MONTH

THE DICTATOR had not counted fully on his enemies. Every other nation except the United States launched its air fleets that night. His thousand planes were met in the air before they had crossed their own borders. All that night raged the battle. With morning came the beginning of another world war in which the science of seven nations did its best to destroy and kill.

It was different from the last World War. Not one nation had a friend or an ally it could trust. Every nation started in to fight the world, each thinking that its instruments of destruction were greater and more deadly than those of all other nations. The United States and Canada remained on guard, thinking that they were protected by the oceans; but when the Panama Canal was blown up and the Hawaiian Islands were captured by the Asiatics they plunged into the multi-war.

For two weeks various parts of the human race gripped one another by the throat, and then came the flood. Tidal waves and earthquakes should have given warning of what was going to happen, but the nations were too busy killing and being killed to pay attention. But when the oceans started to cover their lands they were forced to start thinking about it.

The ice of Antarctica was melting. The whales knew it, the sea-lions had fled for their lives, but no human being actually saw what was happening. Five thousand volcanoes had opened their flaming throats in that land of perpetual ice. The water flowing down their maws only excited them to fresh fury. Fire that had rolled restlessly for millions of years now started in gigantic, super-heated fury to the surface. Antarctica was being turned into a furnace. The world was being covered with the water it spewed out. . . .

Fantastic? Imaginative? Yes indeed, this startling tale is all of that, but it is so convincingly told as to seem quite real, perhaps even prophetic. It is the story of a world gone mad, of the folly of too much gold, of a super-civilization under the antarctic ice, established not by beings from another planet, but by descendants of the Moors of Spain. This novelette will be printed complete in the December WEIRD TALES:

LORDS OF THE ICE

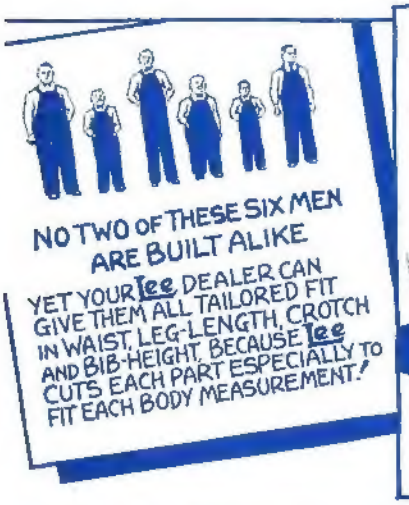
By David H. Keller

——also——

a wealth of other gripping weird stories

December Issue of Weird Tales . . Out November 1

Believe It or Not! by Ripley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C. $32.50
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D. $50
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